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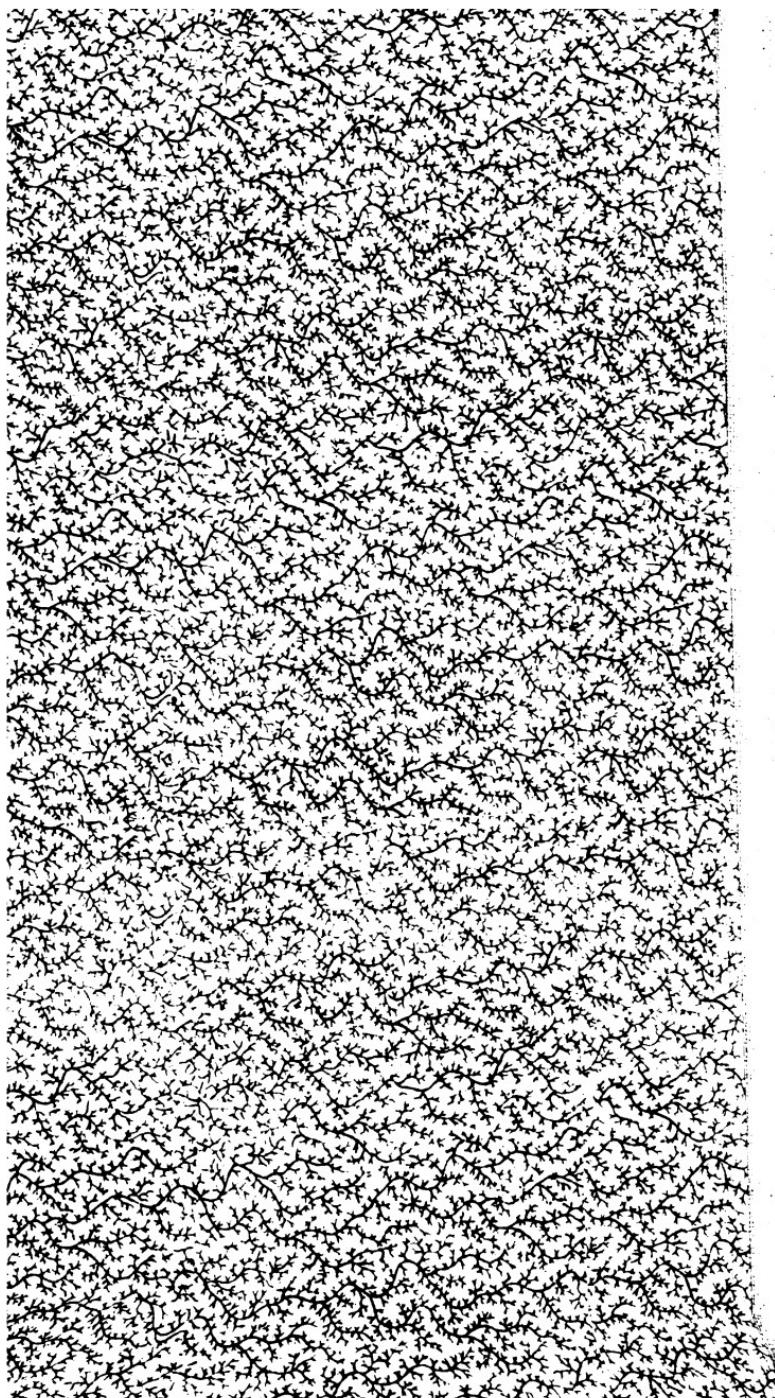
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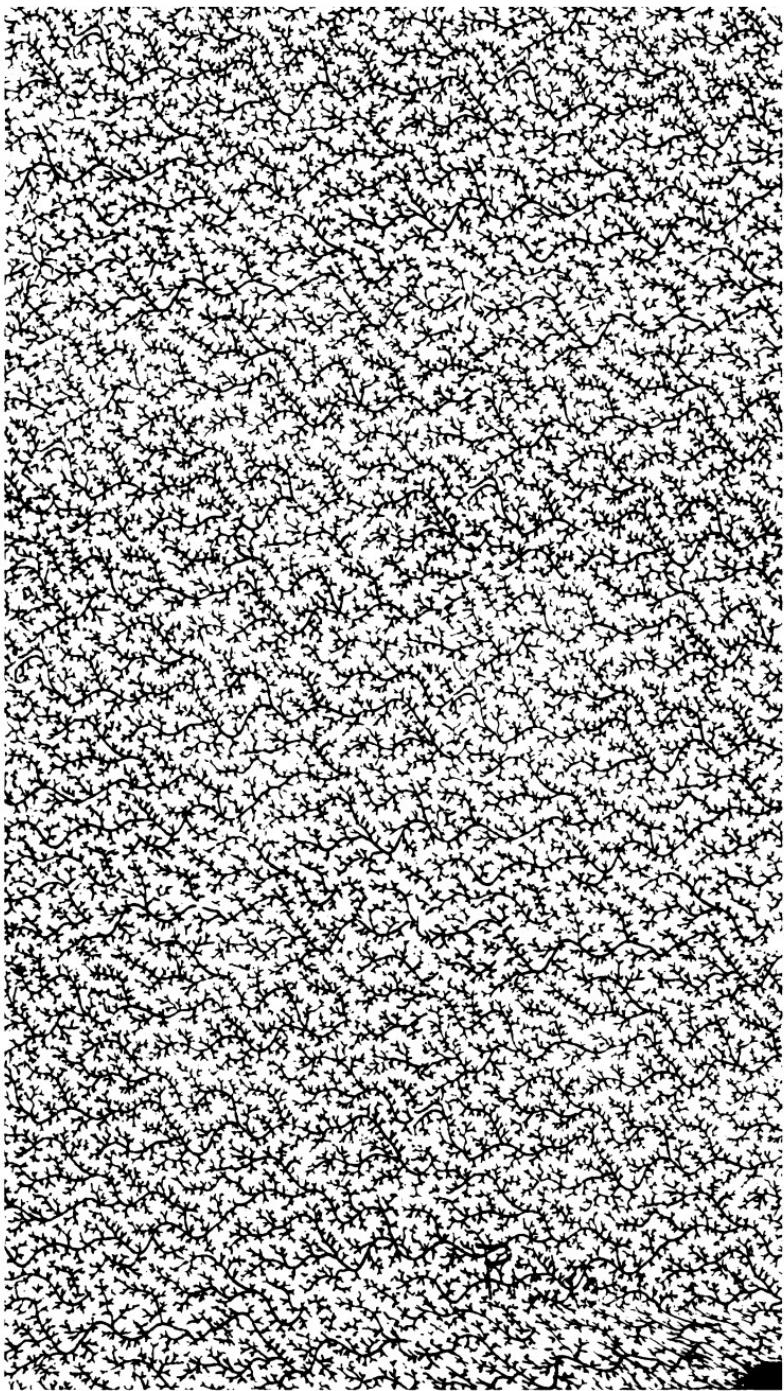
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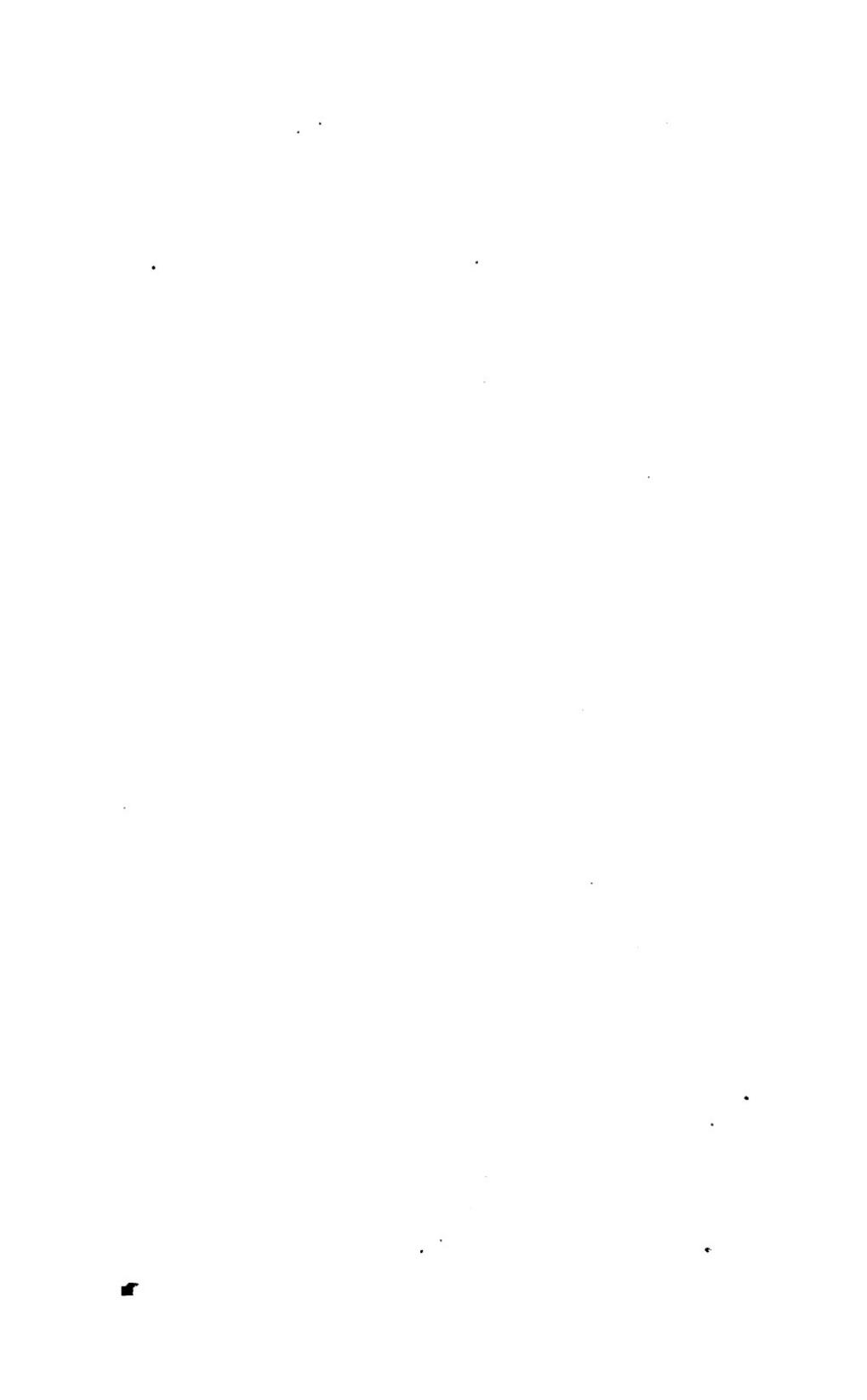


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THE SQUIRE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HEIRESS," "AGNES SEARLE," &c.

X

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Pickering, Ellery

PHILADELPHIA:

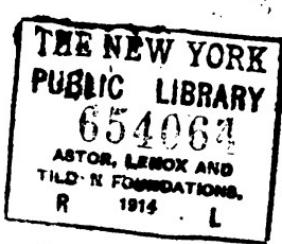
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T H E S Q U I R E.

CHAPTER I.

It was a dull November afternoon. The mist hung heavily on the distant hills and above the intervening hollows. The sun, sinking in the west, lent no glory to the closing day, but seemed creeping to its rest in gloom and heaviness, as if ashamed that its might had not dispelled the fog—that its noon-day splendour had been obscured. No wonder that it hid its face! the vanquished do not like to be looked on! and there cannot be even the semblance of glory in being conquered by a fog. The present defeat resembled genius overthrown by stupidity!—borne down by the mere dull, animal weight of wealth! No wonder that the sun crept to its rest with a stealthy step and shrouded face! If it could not conquer in the heyday of its might, its only wisdom was to retire as speedily and quietly as the laws of nature would admit. That noxious vapours should have the power to darken brightness! It is sad, but very true. Only Chinese pictures have no shade; and though they may be "*selon la fantaisie*,"—that is, Chinese "*fantaisie*,"—they

are certainly not "*selon la nature*,"—that is, English nature.

Not that those who discriminate the weather closely, and affect accuracy in the description of its various varieties, would have pronounced it to be a fog: they would only have declared it to be a misty day, leaving it to the less cautious or more impatient to add, dull, heavy, chilling, and unbearable.

Dull, heavy, chilling, it certainly was, though not unbearable; such things have been borne before—must be borne again; but to my judgment, (and I rather pique myself on its correctness—who does not?) it was more dull, more heavy, more chilling, than would have been a dense, unsightless fog. There is something partaking of the sublime in a real fog. When nothing can be seen, all things may be imagined: beauties and defects—the grandeur of nature, the littleness of the art—the striking outlines of the uncultivated mountain, the petty details of this work-a-day world, are all hidden from our view; the blind and the seeing, the observing and the heedless, are brought nearly on a level: none can distinguish more than ten yards in advance, and man sees (pardon the Irishism) how narrow and bounded are his views: It seems as though his mortal course was run, and he had gained nothing by his toil and trouble. He looks back: all is objectless, obscure; there is no vestige of his labours gleaming through the mist—his very steps untraced upon the earth. The monument erected to his sorrows, and the triumphal arch to his glories, are alike lost in the gloom. His joys and his griefs have left no trace: he has felt—he has laughed—he has mourned: perhaps he had wealth—had genius—had dominion—and deemed himself a glorious being! Where are the trophies of his glory? They are hidden from his view; his gaze cannot pierce the gloom: there are no visible proofs of his triumphs; they are as nothing in the eyes of others—even his own eye cannot mark them. He learns a juster estimate of himself—he forms a truer judgment of his deeds.—He looks before: how bounded is his view! He cannot pierce the gloom—he cannot see into the future—he trembles at its unseen perils. Wo to him who would trace its obscurity without a safer guide than man's unaided reason!

The history of his own past is traced on memory's roll—

the characters cannot be obliterated ; but the tale is lost to others—unknown to multitudes, as the past history of those countless crowds is lost—unknown to him. The grosser part of his nature receives a shock to its pride, and he better understands his worth in the universe—his comparative relation to the Unseen and Infinite. Yet the veil of the past shall be withdrawn—the deeds of each stand clearly forth—man's most secret thoughts be bared to the gaze of the countless hosts marshalled before the eternal throne for judgment ; he shall hear his doom, whilst applauding crowds proclaim the sentence just,—the righteous award of One who has said he will judge man by his acts, whether they be good or whether they be evil, and who has promised that none shall be lost but those who will not come to him. The evil of the hereafter rests justly on man's own head. Let us think of this in the early dawn—at the sunset hour—in the noon-day glow and the midnight gloom—in joy and in sorrow—in sickness and in health—in low estate and in lofty rank.

The veil of the future, too, will be withdrawn, though mortal eye cannot pierce it now. Those splendours too dazzling for our gaze, too glorious for our comprehension, will then be revealed,—the mysteries of our heavenly Father's love be then made plain ; and they who have, even here, seen something of its beauty and its power, through faith and hope, will then rejoice and adore.

Was ever fog so moralized upon before ?—we imagine not. This is an age of wonders : the dull may see nothing in a fog but a fog, (for the race of non-seers is numerous,) the anticipative and impatient, only a very disagreeable check to some pleasureable excursion. Now, a fog is frequently disappointing, rarely agreeable ; yet do we maintain that a real, sightless, *bond fide* fog—such as may be seen, perhaps, once in a winter, (once is quite often enough,) has some touch of the sublime.

But, we repeat, it was not a fog this sixth day of November 177—. The murky sky, the heavy mist, hanging about on hill and valley, hinted that it might have been a fog in the morning—that it might be a fog again at night ; but a fog—that is, a sublime fog—at that moment it certainly was not. Objects could be distinguished near, and even in the distance, though not clearly : it was neither all gloom nor

all shone; in fact, it had no affinity with the latter; and to say that it was neither wet nor dark, was the utmost the most courteous could report in its favour. If one was neither afraid of being drenched nor benighted, at least there was no beauty, no variety of colouring, no changing and striking lights to awaken admiration. There was no break in the heavens—no lights on the earth; the forms that were visible were indistinct—traced, as it seemed, with the timid and confused touch of a beginner.

Had a landscape-painter (unable to depict the human form) wished to image stupidity and weariness in a representation of soulless nature, hero was the model to his hand. You could not even hope that a ray from genius might enlighten the uniform dulness:—you might believe it had tried, and failed. The heaviness seemed determined: there was no room for speculation on the subject; there it was, and the conviction was forced upon you that there it would be:—you might almost imagine it eternal. Nature seemed out of humour,—not in a rage, (that partakes of the sublime,) —not even petulant, (that promises change,) —but sullen.

The thermometer would not have justified a very violent declamation against the cold, or a smothering quantity of furs; but the heart felt it was cold,—very cold,—chilling, benumbing; not so absolutely freezing as to command a bold effort to bear it,—that would have caused a little excitement, (petty vexations, winning little glory for their well-bearing, are rarely well borne;) but the air seemed chilling, paralyzing the fancy with its torpid touch, painting the future in gloom to the mental eye as the surrounding landscape was already painted to the bodily: in short, it was one of those days on which one feels wretched—wretched without a hope of relief,—without the power to avert the doom, or lighten its cruelty. The best remedy for such a tyranny is to sleep, if you can;—at least so seemed to think one of the occupants of the travelling-chaise winding slowly up a dreary hill in a thinly inhabited part of an inland county. Snugged up in one corner, his hat laid aside that his head might rest more comfortably against the cushioned back, his fair, handsome, open countenance, occasionally twitched into slight contortions with the vagaries of sleep, and entirely heedless of his young companion, cuddled up in the other corner, reclined Philip Conyers, called by the villagers

"The Squire;" by his friends, (enemies he had none, or so he thought,) "Honest Phil Conyers,"—the kindest hearted and the most hospitable host, the hardest drinker, the most daring rider, the most generous and unsuspicious of men, though withal a little quick at times: but then the breeze was over on the instant, and the bosom as unruffled as before.

It was the very last sort of day to choose for returning home,—all looking so dull and heavy might induce a fancy of not being welcome; but Philip Conyers had no fancy, and paid little heed to the gloom: it had only made him sleepy. Not so his gentle companion: she had seen little notable in reality,—her years had been few. Life might be said to her to be all fancy, and she felt as if she were unwelcome: unsympathized with, she undoubtedly was. She bent forward, looked on the handsome and prepossessing features of the sleeper, so indicative of his frank and generous temper, then with a sigh shrank more closely into the corner, and forgot the present whilst dwelling on the past.

"Tally ho! hark forward!" shouted the squire, with a view-holla that must have awakened the seven sleepers of the Eastern tale, (if any thing could,) starting from his uneasy slumber, and dashing down the side glass to look out, regardless of the cold raw air, or the alarm and surprise of his timid daughter.

Ear and eye were exercised in vain; he heard only the creaking of the wheels as the carriage was slowly dragged up the wearying hill,—saw only the difficult ascent before him.

"Did not you hear the hounds, Mabel?" he inquired, turning to his gentle child, who had not recovered from the effects of his sudden burst and startling holla.

"No, sir," replied Mabel in a voice tremulous from emotion.

Her father looked at her for an instant, and out again on the dull hill; then pulling up the glass as hastily as he had dashed it down, muttered something of his having dreamt,—for it was no hunting day,—adding, as some sort of apology for his slumber, that he felt heavy, not being used to a carriage, striving at the same time to keep his eyes open, in which with great difficulty he succeeded. His companion made no reply, his words requiring none, and there was si-

lence till they gained the summit of the hill. Here the squire again put down the glass, but, with a more gentle action, again thrust his head from the window, directing her attention to some distant object, his countenance brightening with the prospect of a speedy deliverance from the confinement of the carriage, as well as with the kindly idea that he could entertain his fellow-traveller.

" You say you forget your home, Mabel,—there it stands in the distance; and well does the old Grange look too, with its gable ends and its tall chimneys.—Not there, child,—this side. Can't you see? Why, you really have forgotten your home!" he added impatiently, as, forgetting that his outstretched head prevented all view from one window, he marvelled at his daughter's stupidity in looking from the other.

She could not deny the charge of having forgotten the situation of the Grange, or rather of not knowing it, (she had not been there since her third year;) but, without offering any defence, she turned her gaze in the direction to which he pointed. Unhappily her eyes were dimmed with weeping, or she was not naturally far-sighted, or her father, knowing the direction in which the Grange was situated, fancied he saw what might be, rather than what really was seen.

" I believe the girl does not see it now," he continued, more impatiently, on Mabel's making no remark on the beauty of the Grange, as he had expected, though she continued to look in the right direction.

No wonder he was a little provoked. People who will not see what they ought to see are the most annoying of travelling-companions: the iron cage would be too light a doom for their stupidity.

" Do you see it, Mabel?"

" I think I see something in the distance," replied his daughter, hesitatingly; for Mabel was the most sincere of human beings, and would not even in the matter of sight-seeing be guilty of a falsehood.

" Think you see something in the distance! So do I,—two crows on a fallow-field, and an idiot boy driving a donkey. Have you quite forgotten your home, Mabel Conyers? My poor sister should have taught you better. I never forgot her at Christmas."

"I left it so very young, sir,—so long since. My poor aunt ever taught me to love you and the Grange."

"Ay, ay; I forgot you were but a baby then, and a sickly one too. I dare say, poor Eliza did all that was right," replied her father kindly, shamed from his impatience by her tremulous tones, and eager to check the falling tears. "I am quick of temper: never heed my impatience, but dry your eyes. My sister was as kind a creature as ever lived: she was too good for this world, and she is gone to a better; but you have a fond father still left!—Come, cheer up, and I will show you the Grange, and every thing else worth seeing," drawing her towards him and kissing her pale cheek as he spoke.

Mabel did try to cheer up and seem grateful for his intended kindness, though that kindness (the rude touching of a recent wound) pained more than it soothed; whilst she looked with a shudder at the deeply rutted and miry road, and the dreary landscape round—forming so great a contrast to the level ways and smiling scenery encircling the abode she had so lately quitted. By dint of pointing out a hill to the left, a clump to the right, and directing the eye exactly as the finger pointed over some intervening objects, Mr. Conyers succeeded in making his child at least believe that she saw the Grange; and her assurance of the fact pleased and satisfied him. This accomplished, his next task was to warn her against impatience, as they were yet some miles distant and the road was tedious. There was nothing worth seeing at present, but he would point out the village as soon as it came in sight.

Another glance at the execrable road, and some unmanly jolts as they descended the hill and crept slowly round its base in the valley below, proved the wisdom of his warning against impatience. After thanking him for his promise, the daughter and her father again sank into their respective corners and their former silence. The one thought of the inspiring chase, the sagacious hound, the swift hunter, and the gay carouse; the other thought of the warm heart, now cold, who had been as a mother to her—the small but fairy-like abode she had quitted, the one parent whom she had never known, and the other whom, from long absence and a contrast in every taste, she respected rather than loved, and, notwithstanding all his kindness, feared. The thoughts of

the one were cheering; the thoughts of the other, saddening.

Mrs. Conyers, (the most timid and gentle of beings,) long drooping, had died soon after the birth of Mabel, who was supposed to inherit the delicate constitution of her mother. What could Mr. Conyers do with a sickly female infant? With the kindest of hearts, he was certainly not the best qualified in the world to rear a delicate child or form female manners, and readily did he consent to his dying wife's request of consigning Mabel to the charge of his only sister, a maiden lady but one year younger than himself—the only old maid, as he declared, whom he could ever endure; and he almost considered her as a widow. Faithfully had the aunt fulfilled the charge she had undertaken, and justly did her pupil value her love and care.

If her ideas were tinged with what the world of that day and of this would call romance;—if she still dreamt of gallant gentlemen and peerless dames, after the multitude had awakened from the delusion;—if she still thought that love, as they tell in the olden time, might live unchanged, unchilled, through a long, long life, amid the deprivations of poverty and the luxuries of prosperity;—still the same, or but more pure, more holy, though the storm or the pestilence swept the loved one from the earth;—surely the coldest, the most reasonable, will pardon her when the tale of her early life shall be told—the most ultra utilitarian will check his sneer.

Few were more loved and lovely—more courted and admired, or more worthy of all this, than Elizabeth Conyers. The love sought by many was early bestowed on one, and the hand was promised where the heart had long been given. Who might not have envied Elizabeth Conyers at the age of twenty! There was no earthly blessing that was not hers in possession, or in promise! With birth, fortune, beauty, gentleness, and firmness joined; esteemed by all; loving and beloved by one; who should think of dangers in her onward path?—who should predict of sorrow to her future life? The bridal week was come;—two more days, and the gentle Elizabeth would plight her faith at the altar.

"Two more days, and you will be mine,—wholly mine!—mine only!" whispered the lover to the blushing girl as he bade her farewell, mounting his horse that had long been

ready to convey him to the nearest town for the purpose of effecting some last arrangement.

The lover rode forth in the morning, rich in every blessing, buoyant with health, exulting in his high hopes, rejoicing in the love, the virtues, and the beauty of his intended bride. Life, hope, delight, in every look and movement, each so vivid—what should check them? Ere night came, the active limbs were still—the lightsome laugh was hushed—the happy smile departed! The bounding heart no longer beat—the rounded cheek no longer glowed—he lay on his bier, cold, silent, pale! He had passed from life in the power of his youth and beauty! He had not faded by a slow decay—the destroyer had touched him, and he had fallen! In the morning he had been full of life;—before evening came, he was the prey of death! He had been thrown from his horse, and so seriously injured, that within three hours he was a corpse! The hand of his Elizabeth was held in his dying grasp!—his only articulate words were a hope of their future reunion!

It was long before Miss Conyers recovered from the shock;—some thought she never did. The gaiety of youth was gone for ever; but a gentle, holy sweetness had succeeded, a thousand times more touching. She did not withdraw from society, but entered rarely into its gayer scenes. She was kind and gentle to all; but none again proffered hand and heart, though some would gladly have done so, had not her manner fully proved that her love still lingered with the dead.

There was much in the character of Mrs. Conyers and the circumstances attending her marriage to engage the love and sympathy of her gentle sister-in-law, who soothed the dying mother, and loved the child, first for that mother's sake, but soon more for its own. Miss Conyers took the little Mabel to her own quiet and tasteful home, situated in a more polished and beautiful county, lavishing on her the care and fondness of her warm and noble heart. She fancied a slight resemblance in the fair child to her lost lover, to whom her mother was very distantly related, and thus transferred to her some portion of the affection which had been bestowed on him.

For the two succeeding years she took the little Mabel to her father; and then, as if by mutual consent, and to

their mutual relief, these annual visits were relinquished, though brother and sister continued to assign plausible reasons for the discontinuance; and the former frequently talked of running down to Ivy Cottage when the hay was in, or the harvest done, or the hunting over, or something else concluded, which was always succeeded by something else to be completed, before he could leave home. Though really attached, (an attachment ever proved in essentials,) the tastes, the habits, the ideas of the brother and sister were so totally opposed, that each felt restraint in the presence of the other. The ill-ordered house of the widower—his jovial companions—his kind, but rather rough and noisy manners, little suited the gentle and retiring Elizabeth, her natural gaiety sobered by early suffering, her health never completely restored, her spirit sublimed by her still cherished love for one lost to her upon earth.

Philip Conyers was kind-hearted, generous, and hospitable,—incapable of a mean or dishonourable action,—a good specimen of the country squire of that day. He was an easy landlord and master, harsh only to poachers and vagrants, always ready to assist the unfortunate when it did not interfere with hunting, shooting, or his more than due abhorrence of foreign habits and innovations; a bold rider, a hearty eater, and a hard drinker, according to the fashion of the times. Never was a more stanch supporter of old customs. He always voted for the blue member, because his family had done so before him. To crown all, he was a great cheerer at the toast, of Church and State, without clearly understanding its meaning, and, unhappily, without thinking of, far less practising, the duties required from a member of that church he valued and toasted, not for its beautiful liturgy or its apostolic doctrine, but because it had been the religion of his fathers, was that of his neighbours and connexions, and that he had been brought up in its outward ordinances, and entertained some confused idea that its downfall would be connected with some temporal loss to himself,—perhaps a deprivation of hunting, or a scarcity of wine. To go to the village church, when not very convenient, and make his servants do the same,—to have mince pies at Christmas, salt fish on Good Friday, pay his tithes with only a low grumble, or a joke on the parson, who was rarely seen in the parish but on Sunday,—was sufficient, in

his estimation, to mark him as a worthy member of the church.

It was sad to think that one with so much natural kindness of disposition should have passed the age of fifty with scarcely a care for his eternal welfare, assenting to the necessity of faith in a Saviour as a mere dogma, instead of feeling the immensity of that Saviour's love and striving to acquire an interest in his sacrifice. If an idea that he must render an account of the talents committed to his charge ever came across him, it was speedily dismissed as unpleasant—he never dwelt on unpleasant things. He defrauded none, he employed and gave to many. What more could be required? Of the corruption of the human heart—of the necessity of self-denial—of acts being judged by their principles, whether proceeding from the love of God, or the desire of the applause of men, or the mere riddling ones! of importunity and the sight of pain, he knew nothing—he never inquired.

The constant companion of her aunt, Mabel had imbibed most of her opinions, one strongly resembled her in character. Gentle, yielding, believing all as guileless as herself, she was naturally inclined to trust, to love, and to endeavour to contribute to the happiness of all she met; but, timid and sensitive, she shrank back abashed at the least semblance of rebuke or harshness. Her heart bounded at a smile, felt crushed beneath a frown. Elizabeth Conyers was no prodigy of learning; but, a recluse in her later years, from delicate health, she had found pleasure in cultivating Mabel's taste for the literature of the past, and then present age; and if she had no great depth of thought to bring to the task, she had a delicate and tasteful mind, with a feeling heart, keenly alive to the good and the beautiful. In these her niece resembled her:—both had the poetry of the heart—the romance of life was still bright in each: the one as yet knew not its reality; the other, in consecrating herself to the memory of the dead, had few thoughts to bestow on the petty trials, the follies, and the vices of the living.—One was enshrined in her heart, and for his sake all others were thought well of. He had died in the full splendour of their love!—nor time, nor doubt, nor chance, nor change, had marred its beauty: she deemed it might have lived long years unfaded from its pristine glory. She told of this love

to the gentle Mabel ; and she too indulged in dreams as bright.

If Mabel were ever to mingle in the crowd—to endure the wear and tear of life, other and sterner lessons might have been useful ; the more particularly, considering her father's character. But such lessons she heard not. Her aunt was too much attached to her brother to see that brother exactly as he was. Time and absence had obliterated the feeling approaching to disgust with which she had encountered some of his companions,—had softened the remembrance of the contrast between them,—and whilst teaching her niece to love and respect her unknown parent, in her affection she painted him as what she wished to consider him, as she desired he should be, rather than as what he was. To Mabel's fancy, therefore, this unknown parent was endowed with innumerable graces of thought and feeling, and his idea blended with that of her aunt's lost lover. This was unfortunate, as it made the contrast, when she saw him, the more striking and overwhelming. She felt that she had bestowed the love and duty of a child on an ideal parent : felt it at their first meeting, when they stood beside the bed of the dying, who, deprived of speech by a paralytic stroke, could but look her affection and her hopes,—could but sign her wishes. Her aunt's sudden attack had been Mabel's first real grief, and her instant idea was to send for her father, judging from her own feelings how much he would desire a last meeting with the patient sufferer. He came at her summons, but only in time to see his sister die.

So far he had fulfilled her wishes, and he sincerely mourned her death, more sincerely than Mabel thought, for his mode of showing his grief was strange to her. He looked so surprised and awkward when she clung round him as her sole tie to earth, and seemed so anxious to dispel the grief which she, with the inexperience of youth and the tyranny of a first sorrow, would have cherished, that, trembling and abashed, she shrank from his rough, though kindly-intentioned consolation, and holding gaiety as little short of sacrilege to the departed, sought only the opportunity to weep alone.

The body was precious, though the soul had fled ; and she loved to sit beside that shrouded form, and to press her lips to the cold cheek. To her there seemed a hurry in its

commitment to the tomb, as though grief was irksome, and only assumed as a fitting garment for the time, to be thrown aside on the conclusion of the ceremony; and she was confirmed in this idea on learning that the cottage with all its comforts and embellishments was to be sold immediately. The shrubs her hands had planted, the flowers her care had tended, the drawings she had traced, the books which she had prized, (all sacred in her eyes, endeared by a thousand loving recollections,)—were these to be exposed to the gaze of the vulgar and the curious?—to be critically examined?—priced to the would-be purchaser?—puffed by the auctioneer?—made a jest and a ridicule?—Were these to pass into the hands of uninterested strangers? Could her father have really loved the dead, and yet do this? She knew not that such was the common practice; she never thought of what the world would consider the reasonableness of parting with things for which he could find little or no use. Use!—was what the loved dead had touched, or formed, or tended, to be considered as a mere piece of merchandise?—a matter of profit or of loss? This convinced her of the difference of their feelings towards the departed;—the one had loved, the other had not; so she judged, but she judged incorrectly.

Mr. Conyers had loved his sister—had proved it in many instances, and would have proved it in more had circumstances required it. He had the reality—the usefulness of love, if one may so term it, but little of its beauty, and none of its poetry; such was scarcely to be expected from a fox-hunter of the last century rarely mixing in female society, however generous his nature, and kindly his disposition. If he had ever known any thing of the poetry of feeling, it had faded into prose at the death of his wife.

He saw nothing but the usual course of proceeding in the intended sale; but when he beheld his daughter's passionate burst of grief at its announcement, and comprehended her wishes, he yielded off the instant, rather than see her tears; urging her to cheerfulness, and trying to explain the difference in their feelings by the circumstance of her being a simple girl, he an experienced man.

Mabel was permitted to select what she chose for transportation to the Grange, her own good sense and gratitude for the permission alone bounding her selection; whilst the

cottage itself was let at a low price to an old and esteemed friend of Miss Conyers, who would keep all things as they then were. Mabel's grateful heart again turned to her father with a child's affection; and though the delicacy and sensitiveness of her love received innumerable shocks from his mal-adroit attempts at consolation, those attempts arose so evidently from real kindness, that she tried to repay them by the cheerfulness he recommended, and began better to understand his character and prize his worth, though the awe and disappointment which he had inspired on their first meeting had not passed away.

The word "home," as applied to the Grange, had struck her painfully, recalling the happy home and the beloved guide now lost for ever. The Grange might be beautiful, its grounds extensive, its apartments lofty, but what were these things to her? It was not her childhood's home,—it had none of the charms of early recollections—was linked with none of the young heart's gentle memories. Its greatest merit in her eyes, was its having been the birth-place of her aunt, and had she been going thither with that aunt, she would have been eager to see—resolved to admire it; but she was gone, and the Grange had lost its interest. The beauties her father had principally extolled awakened no admiration; she cared nothing for the best hunting or shooting covers; the most productive arable, or the most fertile pasture land. She had listened with attention, as she always did, but even the not very penetrating squire saw that her heart was not in the matter.

That part of the country in which the Grange was situated, was not remarkable for its general beauty, though some lovely spots in the valleys acquired additional charms from their contrast with the bare and barren hills. There was little level ground, the country emulating the ups and downs of life. It was not till the chaise had gained the summit of another hill, and the little village of Ranford with its great house, the Grange, lay directly beneath, that Mr. Conyers again addressed his daughter.

"There, Mabel,—there is the Grange, where those of our name have lived for more than four hundred years. I always feel happier for looking on its old walls. There!—now you have a full view of it through the trees: make haste, or the wood will hide it again."

Mabel not only looked, but also admired, as was wished ; she would have been deficient in taste if she had not. From that spot the Grange was seen to the greatest advantage. Its picturesque gable ends, its tall twisted chimneys, its gray stone copings, its arched entrance, backed by its rich woods, looked imposing in the distance ; whilst the ground, sloping down to a piece of water in the front, the fresh green, dotted with sheep and cattle, gave a home-feeling to the scene. The observer doubted not of a welcome, till a near approach showed the slovenly style in which all was allowed to remain ;—no, not all,—the stable and the dog-kennel were as they should be.

"I am glad you like it, Mabel. I began to doubt if you could like any thing," said her father, pleased with her admiration. "And, see ! there is old Sarah Williams, dropping courtesy after courtesy ; and that mischievous young dog, Jack Philips, mocking her. They are all coming out to have a stare at you, men and women, dogs, cats, and children. They could not be more curious if they thought to see a dancing-bear. I am quite overlooked.

Mr. Conyers was right ; every cottage in the village disgorged its living contents to see the chaise and the young miss, the former ranking little behind the latter as a wonder, no carriage having been seen at Ransford since Miss Conyers's last visit to the Grange. To see the travelling-chaise in full career was therefore "a marvel and a show" to the simple villagers,—to see the squire in it, who was no patroniser of wheel-carriages, deeming them too luxurious for his sex, enhanced the value of the sight. The young mother hurried out with one child in her arms and two or three clinging to her apron ; the old granny hobbled to the door with her crutch ; the sturdy urchins, male and female, rushed before her, bearing kittens, puppies, ragged dolls, or pop-guns, in their arms ; the dogs yelped and barked ; and the noise and confusion were amazing. The squire was delighted, nodding to one, laughing at another, shouting an inquiry after a third, taking note of the notice of all, as the chaise proceeded at a foot's pace through the village. Greater speed would have been dangerous, so rough was the road.

"It will be better in summer ; the springs rise in it at this season of the year," remarked Mr. Conyers, appearing

to think, for the first time in his life, some apology necessary for its wretched state.

Mabel, too, in the novelty of the scene, forgot her grief for a season, and returned the courtesies and the greetings of the villagers with a sincerity, if not a noise, equal to their own. She had not expected this cordial greeting: she did not consider that curiosity might have increased the crowd of welcomers; enough that she was welcomed; whilst the regard evidenced towards her father, with his ready answers and kindly smile, something lessened her feeling of awe, and drew her closer to him.

CHAPTER II.

"**THERE** is the church," remarked Mr. Conyers, in his character of cicerone, as they drove through the village.—"Your poor mother rests there. That was a sad loss to me; though I sometimes doubt if she was happy, her smile was so sad, and she drooped from the day I brought her home. Yet she had all she wished for. You are like her, Mabel,—very like her," laying his hand on her shoulder, and looking fondly into the fair face turned towards him with anxious interest. "It was a sad loss!—and poor Elizabeth gone too! But cheer up, Mabel,—you have a kind father left. Don't sob so, poor child!" he continued, striving to check the emotion of his daughter, who, encouraged by his faltering tones as he spoke of the departed, had ventured to throw her arms about his neck, and weep upon his bosom. This sudden burst was embarrassing to the squire, who could not bear to see a woman cry; and, ashamed of the moisture in his own eyes, he again made awkward attempts to soothe her.

"Cheer up, Mabel! We must all die; and they are gone to heaven. There,—hush now!—and I will see how gay I can make the Grange. There,—that is the cottage of Martha Wilford, your poor brother's nurse," trying to divert her grief by turning her attention to a small cottage standing some distance up a lane, and nearly hidden by trees.

The promised gaiety had been ineffectual, but at this the weeper raised her head, and looked in the direction pointed out. It was the first time her brother had been named between them; and Martha Wilford was an object of curiosity, from the terms in which she had been spoken of by her aunt. Eager looks were in vain; Martha Wilford came not

to her door, which was closed ; and if she looked at the youthful stranger, she was herself unseen. A turn in the road hid the cottage from her view, and the chaise reached the entrance to the Grange. Half a dozen dirty merry-looking boys were disputing with the aged woman at the lodge for the honour of opening the gate, that, old and rickety, was threatened with destruction by the contest. Mabel smiled at the emulation and vigorous exertions of the boys in scraping their feet and pulling their hair ; but the smile passed away before she reached the house.

Though nothing was in absolute ruin, all, save the stable and kennel, was approaching to decay. It might be imagined the residence of a niggard or a prodigal, as the eye rested upon different objects. The road was muddy and uneven, the ruts (carts passed this way) unlevelled, and the edges uncut ; yet there was a large heap of fine gravel near, almost covered with weeds, which, with a little labour, would have made the road good, instead of being itself, as it now was, only another dismght. The rails fencing the lawn from what was termed the park, were rotten, chipped, broken down, or tied together with pack-thread ; whilst a pile of timber, far more in sight than a pile of timber should be, sufficiently abundant to fence round a hundred such lawns, was decaying unemployed. The handsome front was still there, (stone is a sturdy bearer of neglect,) but the grass grew up by the hall-steps, and uncouth excrescences were tacked on to the ancient structure, with an ill taste in form and arrangement which checked admiration for the original building. If Mr. Conyers was not the creator of these excrescences, he was their apologist when any ventured to condemn them ; for he could not bear that aught connected with the old mansion should be subjected to blame or ridicule.

"There had been large families," he said, "and the old house could not contain the whole tribe of youngsters. Then the ancient hall, nearly occupying the space of the ground floor, might do to sit in on a summer's day, but as well be in an ice-house in winter ; and the door was always left open ; and the dogs came in as they pleased, and carried off what they pleased ; and as times changed, nurseries, and china closets, and dressing-rooms, were wanted, and each built as he liked, instead of paying a man to say you could

not do this, and you could not do that, and this should be higher and that should be lower, puzzling the country workmen, and talking of harmony and nonsense. There were good cellars and kitchens, and a room to receive friends in, and that was enough for him and his visitors."

Accustomed to the most exquisite order and neatness, these discrepancies offended the eye of Mabel, who turned to the lawn, for flowers were her passion. A ragged Portugal laurel, a stunted laurestinus, with the remains of a bordering of thrist, round, weedy, shapeless beds, were the best specimens that met her view. To her all wore a look of desolation, and she again felt with a sinking heart that she was a stranger,—that this was not her home,—that there was little in common between her and the dwellers at her birth-place.

"Down, Fan! Be quiet, Neptune! That is enough, Carlo! Be still, can't you, Dash!" shouted Mr. Conyers, dealing rebuffs and caresses to the innumerable dogs of every breed, that rushed out yelping and barking at the approach of the chaise, and crowded round, fawning and leaping on him before his foot had touched the ground.

"Come, get out, child! Never mind the dogs; they won't hurt you. You can't be my daughter if you could feel afraid of all the curs in the land;—you must have been changed at nurse," he continued, seeing that Mabel shrank from the riotous crew, and drew back into the carriage as a large Newfoundland puppy made a wild spring towards her, never doubting that his caresses would be most thankfully received. Still Mabel hesitated, though unwilling to displease her father by delay.

"Halloo! halloo!" shouted the squire, flinging a stick to some distance. Away rushed the dogs as their master intended, save a sly-looking terrier, and a steady old Newfoundland.

"Now, be quick, child, before the fearful creatures come back. But you must get over this: I hate a woman to be afraid of any thing, and you will soon be used to them. See, old Pompey wants to make friends with you at once, in a quiet, gentlemanly way. He is old now, poor fellow! but he was a famous retriever once, and his mother was a great favourite with Elizabeth. Pat him, Mabel: he could not bite now if he would."

Mabel did pat the old dog, that looked up in her face with gratitude. Her father, pleased with her compliance, would have won the like favour for his other noisy retainers; but, drawing her cloak closely round her, as though she found it cold, she passed into the hall with a hasty step before the would-be familiar Newfoundland puppy and his associates had returned; and the squire with a good-natured smile, mingled with something like contempt at her timidity, followed her example.

"You will have a young mistress instead of an old master for the future, Sarah. Mabel is a capital housewife, I hear."

The person addressed, (a fine-looking woman of forty, in gayer apparel than was usual with house-keepers of those olden times,) looked by no means pleased at the assertion; and though she tried to mould looks and words into a proper welcome of her young mistress, neither she nor the old master failed to perceive that the exchange was disagreeable.

"I dare say Mabel will be no severe mistress, and you must assist her inexperience," remarked the squire kindly, to allay her discomposure. "I hope you have a good dinner for us, and ready too, for I am half famished, and I know that your dinners are worth eating."

"Dinner is only waiting for you, sir," replied Sarah, a little less sullenly.

"That is right: order it up directly; no time for dress to-day."

It was strange to the squire, who for so many years had seen no female gracing his table with her presence, to look at the fair young girl before him, and trace in her an almost twin-like resemblance to her mother, as he had first known her, and who had sat in that very chair, with something of the same sad and timid air so many years before. He started as he first looked up and saw her before him. For a moment he forgot the past, thinking he looked on his young bride; then that past returned to his mind: he thought of that young wife on her death-bed—of the boy whom she had bade him guard—of her earnest look and her sad tones—of some wrong hinted at and forgiven:—he thought of these things, and his eyes were dimmed; but no sooner was he

aware of the weakness than he strove to shake it off, assuming unwonted hilarity.

It was newer and sadder still to Mabel to sit in that strange dark room, with the portraits of her ancestors looking down upon her, as she thought, with cold, unfriendly eyes, the one loved face which she had seen for years no longer before her, and its place supplied by that of an almost stranger. She, too, was indulging in melancholy reflections, the silent tears falling unchidden in her lap, when the scratching of an impatient setter on her arm, who had taken a particular fancy to a bone on her plate, roused her from her reverie in no pleasant manner. She started from her seat with a faint scream, while the ready dog helped himself to the desired morsel.

"A clever fellow," remarked Mr. Conyers. "Take your seat again, Mabel, and do try to conquer these silly fears. I make excuses now, as you have not been accustomed to dogs; but I cannot have such nonsense long. You shall have a whip, if you cannot keep them in order otherwise; but never fear a dog, and he will never hurt you. They are sagacious creatures, dogs," and Mr. Conyers (mounted on one of his hobbies) lectured long on the qualities and exploits of his four-footed favourites to the silent Mabel, who retook her seat in fear and trembling, gladly availing herself of the advice of her father to retire early, who, on his part, felt depressed at her sadness.

Mabel wept herself to sleep, and slept till, starting up, awakened by the confused noise of the trampling of horses and the barking of many dogs, she gazed round in wonder on the oak wainscoted room, with its old grim portraits, and the darkly-curtained bed, all dimly seen by the misty morning light. Was she dreaming still? She sprang to the window. Below was her father in his hunting dress assisting the groom in driving back the dogs, that desired to be his escort. The task was accomplished, and, putting spurs to his hack, for he was late, he galloped from her sight, without one look, one thought, as it seemed, on the lonely girl who was gazing so sadly upon him. It was still early, and Mabel wept herself to sleep again. The feeling of desolation grew the stronger; she felt that man's love was not as woman's,—that her father's grief was not as hers. She cherished the memory of the departed—he strove to forget it.

The day was twin to the preceding,—no sunshine to gladden, no break in the clouds to give hope. She went over the house and the near grounds with the house-keeper and gardener, and the hasty impression of the day before was confirmed. Though young and inexperienced, she could not fail to perceive that her father's affairs in every department were ill managed, his good nature inducing him to grant every request that did not very materially interfere with his personal comfort. Every family in the village had a member quartered on him in doors or out; and the number of loiterers in the kitchen and the stables, helping each other to do nothing, save devour the squire's substance, would have been absolutely horrifying to any zealous economist.

"One mouth cannot make much difference," had been repeated and acted on till a skeleton regiment might have been embodied from the hangers-on at the Grange. Much was actually consumed, to the moral advantage of none,—for idleness teaches no good; and, unhappily, still more was lost and wasted. There was every where, and in every thing, the same contrast of want and abundance, spoiling, or ill applied, which Mabel had remarked the day before. Waste, extravagance, and indolence reigned in every department, and the Grange was as though under the absolute rule of the fairy Disorder.

There was little outward pomp or show; to one used to neatness, little comfort. But a princely fortune could not long have stood the under-current of waste, and it was reported that the squire's lands were not lightly mortgaged; but this was the only point on which he was not perfectly frank and open. The domain once belonging to the Conyers had been sadly curtailed in its descent, whenever the expiration or cutting off of an entail allowed a sale. It was believed that the estate had not come unincumbered to the present possessor; but, as the last in tail, it rested with him to clear, by a farther sale, any difficulties caused by himself or others, as also to devise the property as he should choose. A hint on the subject ever put him in a passion; and he would not see that his kindness, which descended into weakness, and his disinclination to look into his own affairs must sooner or later cause the catastrophe he dreaded. With Burleigh he thought, "He who sells an acre of land loses an ounce of credit;" and sell land he would not:—neither would he curtail his expenses.

"He hated niggards; his family had always been hospitable, and he would not be the first miser of the name."

Distressed at the strong evidence of waste, Mabel spoke gently on the subject, her father having desired her to take the control of the household; but the task of making that household clean, thrifty, and orderly would have exceeded the powers of Hercules. He might cleanse the Augean stable: he would not have reformed and purified the household at the Grange. Every hint even at a better arrangement was met by the reply, that "it was according to master's will or wishes,—it had been so for years; they had been too long accustomed to old ways to learn new fashions." Poor Mabel was indeed alone.

Her father was displeased with her tears and timidity, and the servants showed their vexation at the presence of a mistress, and worse, a reforming mistress,—one who loved neatness and frugality. The very dogs, taking her fear for ill will, showed their teeth at her approach, save old Pompey and the young Newfoundland, who, much to her annoyance, continued his impertinent advances; and even the old black cat swore at her for finding fault with her helping herself to some cold beef, without waiting for the ceremony of permission, or the etiquette of a knife and fork.

We are creatures of habit: and it is very disagreeable to be forced to be cleanly, when one has learnt to find pleasure in being dirty,—to be compelled to be in order, when one has acquired a taste for disorder. Besides, once begin reform, there is no knowing where it may end.

The idle hangers-on trembled for their idleness; the engaged domestics for their perquisites, allowed or disallowed; some feared that they should be obliged to work, others to remain sober. Their master could not with much show of justice reprove them on the latter point,—their young lady might. Minor differences were forgotten, and all united in a resolution to resist the new ruler in the home department, to preserve their rights untouched,—for as rights they considered them from habit,—and their abuses unreformed. A determined but civil opposition to her wishes was unanimously resolved on. One rebel might have been dismissed; but their kind-hearted master would never part with all his old servants. They were wise, as far as the wisdom of this world goes; and Mabel's sense of isolation increased as

every moment waned. She longed for her loved cottage, with its happy look of home, and her own cheerful little apartment; she trod the dark passages, leading to chambers nearly as dark and narrow, with a sad and timid step; and as she sat in the large gloomy drawing-room, with its dark panels and its antique furniture, and heard the noise made by her heavy chair on the slippery oaken floor as she drew nearer to the wide chimney,—for, according to the country fashion of those times, there was only a small piece of carpet in the centre of the room,—she started as if she had committed a crime, and glanced with a frightened look at the grim starch portraits round, fancying, for the hundredth time, that they eyed her with no friendly mien. She tried to brighten the fire on the wide open hearth; but the irons were heavy for her small hands, and the huge green logs only smoked, or hissed across the dogs, whilst the room looked the home of discomfort. The heavy mahogany chairs, with their black seats and upright backs, stood close up against the wainscot in regular array, as if determined to be formal; the walls felt damp, as well they might, the room being rarely used; whilst the increasing mist added to the gloom.

To have ordered drier fuel would have ensured (as she knew from experience) an irruption of all the dogs, with such noisy, and perhaps purposely, ineffectual endeavours to eject them, should she make the request, as was a greater evil than a hissing sulky fire. She was a stranger in her father's halls!—the work lay untouched on her lap; and tears flowed unheeded.

"How are you, Mabel?—quite recovered the journey?" asked her father, kindly, entering the room with the whole tribe of dreaded dogs at his heels.

Hastily wiping her eyes, Mabel advanced to take her father's proffered hand, looking fearfully at the dogs as she did so.

"Back!" cried her father, smiling at her alarm; dispersing his train with a brisk circling of his whip, and a crack that startled his daughter more than his dogs.

The squire could not forbear a laugh at her jump; though, kissing her affectionately, he again asked kindly how she had rested.

"You are moped, poor child," seeing her tears; "no

wonder, all day alone. You shall ride with us to-morrow, and I will see what I can do to make you gay ; but you must get over your fear of dogs. What a fire you keep ! it would not singe Rover's tail. How is this ?"

"The servant says the wood is wet."

"He says the wood is wet, does he ? Then why does not he bring some that is dry ? he knows this is not proper for the drawing-room. My eye off for a moment, and the rascals do nothing right. Hollo there, John ! what do you mean by bringing such wood as this into the drawing-room, and only Miss Conyers at home to manage it ?"

"Please, sir, Miss——"

"Change it directly. I want no words ; and mind it does not happen again. You must speak sharp to the rogues, Mabel, and give them a hollo now and then, or they will never mind you, instead of jumping as though you had heard a lion roar."

"Then I fear I have but little chance of being attended to," replied Mabel with a faint smile at his advice. "I did but hint a wish that the kitchen and the dairy should be kept a little more in order—the pans and dishes better washed ; and I was met with assertions from all sides, that you preferred pans and dishes unwashed, and any where but in their places."

The squire's hearty laugh rang through the room.

"That is just like them ! and accounts for the whole kitchen department being in rebellion. The cook and all her scullions (on my word, I think she has more than she needs) began talking together as I passed through, telling me some rigmarole of your starving the dogs, not letting them lick the dishes; but I would not hear the nonsense. You must not hint and whisper, you must rate them soundly, or they will never attend. I am obliged to give them a blow-up myself sometimes, for they are idle rogues."

"If they require that, sir, I shall never be heeded."

"I don't think you will," replied the squire, looking at the gentle being before him, his features lighting up with a father's pride at her loveliness. "I doubt the wisest plan will be to let them go on their own way for the present; they have had it so long, no wonder they don't like to lose it. I believe them to be honest rogues after all, and attached to the family. Sarah keeps them in tolerable order,

and I should not like to appear near, so let them go on as usual; and only speak sharp on great occasions,—that is, if you *can* speak sharp. If they bring you wet wood again, or neglect any thing for your comfort, I will turn them off directly," he added in loud voice, as the servant entered with dry logs. "And now I must get ready for dinner.—By the by, I have brought you home a visiter, Mabel, to spend some days: you will be sure to like him—every one likes Durnsford."

And Mabel did like Durnsford, and applied to him by word or look in all her troubles, and smiled her brightest smile when he declared that he should demand her of her father.

And who was Richard Durnsford? and what was he like? Was he young, or old? tall or short, rich or poor? plain or handsome? In good truth, there are some of these questions his friends could not, and some he would not answer. His friends said he was neither tall nor short—neither positively handsome, nor absolutely plain, but with the most prepossessing and best wearing of countenances; but whether he was rich or poor—young or old, those friends would not take upon themselves to say; neither would he, when questioned on the subject. His answers on both points were lively jests, or brilliant repartees. Mr. Conyers, and others of his standing, declared him to be little younger than themselves; but his looks belied the declaration, and he avowed his determination of being always young, of never becoming old, with such a fascinating smile at the folly of the assertion, as rendered it difficult to deny its truth, or its wisdom. Then riches, he declared, depended entirely on the mind; he was rich, and he only, who considered himself so; for his part, he was resolved to believe himself the greatest capitalist in England.

Relations he had few—at least, in those parts, or of whom he talked; but his friends were countless—nearly, if not quite, of equal number with his acquaintance. He had the penetration to discover the way all wished to walk, and the tact and good nature never to seem to stand before them in that way. He could do all things for every body;—prescribe for dame or dog; talk sense and politeness to the mother; sing and dance with the daughter; drink and discuss agriculture with the father; hunt and shoot with the son. He was the friend of the family in families innumerable. But

the most remarkable things about him were, that though all came to him for consolation and advice, none were jealous of his influence; and though willing to oblige all, no one despised him—no one spoke of him with contempt. His was genius—the highest genius for society.

He had no fixed home. How could he have, without unkindness to his numerous friends in every part of England? His home was every where, with all his friends; and never was he known to weary any with his presence, ever departing before the heart acknowledged, and long ere the lip said that his visit had been long. He was always pressed with sincerity to remain,—ever welcomed with pleasure, and ever parted from with regret; whilst his steady and taciturn groom, with his three fine horses, were quartered in some neighbouring village, if their master entertained the shadow of a doubt as to his host's hospitality.

He hated a frown, he said, as he hated a bog; he could not endure a check in his career, and hitherto he had had the wisdom to avoid it. From Mr. Conyers he was certain of the warmest welcome; he knew this, and much of his time had been spent at the Grange. The bachelor life of the owner suited him—it was liberty-hall; but now it had a young mistress, he might find it different. He found no difference: within a few days, he was as great a favourite with the daughter as with the father, and she felt less restraint towards him than towards her parent. He was ever prompt to guess her wishes—more prompt to fulfil them. When her father proposed her riding, the second day after her arrival, and would have mounted her on a skittish horse, without any heed to her terror, or her assertion of never having mounted any thing more spirited than an old stupid Shetland pony,—declaring that a daughter of his must know how to ride, and could have no fear,—he took her part so kindly, yet so judiciously, that the plan was laid aside till he had procured her a more fitting steed. In all her troubles, he was the same kind friend.

Before he took his final departure (at the end of three months,) the greater part of which he had spent at the Grange, Mabel better understood her father's character, and no longer felt so timid and so desolate. She had just laid aside her mourning, in compliance with Mr. Conyer's wishes; and he had yielded to hers, that she should not be

compelled into society till the county races, when he insisted that she should be introduced, young as she was—not eighteen. Till then, she would be little troubled with visitors; so bad were the roads, so thinly inhabited the country round. She had so far conquered her fear of the dogs, that she warmed herself at the fire, though to do so she was compelled to displace one or more of the sleeping animals: she no longer objected to some of the tribe forming her escort when she walked; nay, she permitted the attentions of the riotous Newfoundland, and coaxed old Pompey to be her constant companion.

The rebellion to her rule in kitchen and dairy was subdued, or, more correctly speaking, had subsided into an armed neutrality, on the part of the domestics and their satellites. Too gentle and timid to wish to interfere after once stating what she had seen to her father, she acted on his desire to leave all as it had been before; so that her power was no farther exerted than in approving of the dinner proposed by Sarah, and in occasionally sending broth and delicacies to the sick poor. Her orders were always attended to, her wishes generally respected, and her sweet temper would have won love, had not the former rebels feared, from her occasional advice to the villagers, that her desire for reform was not extinct; only slumbering for a time, ready to break forth again should they relax their vigilance.

They little guessed how Mabel shrank from reproofing, only doing so as matter of duty. That she disapproved of much she saw, was certain; and that much which she did not see, was still more reprehensible, was as certain: but too timid for contention, she never rebuked but when the comfort of her father or of some invalid required it. Thoughtless, injudicious kindness, and indolent extravagance, had long ruled in the house and village; and the attendant evils were too great to admit of cure by a gentle hand. Though the servants were all respectful, knowing their misdeeds, they looked on her with dread; and she felt, save in the instance of the old gardener, and Ned the groom, who had been there in her mother's time, that she was served from interest, not affection. This was not seen by her father, and she did not mention it.

The neglected garden and shrubbery began to look a

little less neglected under her care and the gardener's labour, though the season was against her wishes, and the old man sometimes obstinate. Her father had promised her flowers in the spring, and had absolutely insisted on his orders to repair the fence being obeyed; so that the Grange did look more like a comfortable home than it had done for years.

Hard drinking (one of the vices of the times, now happily amended, we will hope from higher motives than mere fashion,) did sometimes force on Mabel's knowledge what greatly shocked her; but she had no wish to see her father's errors:—to turn him from them was not in her power. To her, in essentials, he was ever kind: she might have dressed in cloth of gold, had she so wished, and could have proved that it was no French fashion. She now rarely wept; and though her laugh was seldom heard, and her step had scarcely the buoyancy of youth, yet she glided about with such a gentle grace—her smile was so softly bright—there was such a calm and dove-like beauty in her eyes, with such a touch of feeling in all she did or said—and she was without so lovely, that the squire looked upon her with a father's pride, and began to love her with a father's love, though his mode of showing this was not always that which Mabel would have preferred. We have said that he had affection, but none of its poetry:—Mabel, perhaps, had too much for her own happiness.

"Good bye, Miss Conyers; recollect you have promised to hold me in remembrance," said Mr. Durnsford, raising to his lips the hand she had freely given,—a rarer courtesy than in these degenerate days.

"Pooh! man: one would think you were her lover, with that formal gallantry;—I should not frown, though you touched her lips: you are old enough to be her father," said the blunt squire.

"No such thing!" replied his guest, still retaining, with a gentle and respectful violence, the hand that sought to be withdrawn, and taking no notice of the hint evidently displeasing to Mabel; "no such thing, Philip Conyers! I am not old enough to be her father:—I am a young man now, and mean to be a young man all my life. Father, indeed!—why I have taken a romantic cottage at Newton Marsh, and I mean to claim Miss Conyers for my bride before the end of the year!"

"Is that true, Mabel?" asked her father, highly diverted at the idea, and the avowed youth of his old friend.

"I am afraid I am too old for him, since he is so very young," replied Mabel with a quiet archness rare in her.

"Not a whit too old," rejoined Mr. Durnsford. "I want age and gravity to balance my youth and giddiness:—so you will be mine, lovely Mabel!"

"I think not: Mabel Conyers will be Mabel Conyers some time longer," she replied with a blush,—withdrawing her hand, and placing it within her father's arm; though why she did so, or why she spoke more gravely than before, she would have found some difficulty in explaining.

"Hear! hear! hear!" shouted her father. "We shall have a new tragedy,—'Richard, or the Rejected Lover!'"

"With an afterpiece,—'The Rejected Lover the Accepted Husband!'" replied his guest, joining in the laugh.

"There is no hope for you, Durnsford;—Mabel Conyers will not have you."

"Mabel Conyers will have me."

"When?"

"When I ask her."

"Ay, that she will, I doubt not; and you shall have my consent when you have won hers."

"Shall I? Remember this!"

"I will."

"Farewell, lovely Mabel!—you will be my bride in time."

"Make haste;—time waits for none," remarked the squire.

"I shall make no unnecessary delay; and what I say I will do, shall be done. Health to my future bride and father, till we meet again!"

"Good fortune to my future son!"

CHAPTER III.

"HALLOO! halloo!—there, Rover!—after him, my man," shouted Edward Elton to a grave old dog beside him, pointing to a rabbit-running across the lawn.

Old Rover raised his head, pricked his ears, looked at the flying rabbit, then up in his young master's face, and finally settled his head comfortably again between his paws. Not so young Rover; the unhappy kitten he had been baying at for the last ten minutes was relieved from his attentions, and away dashed the overgrown puppy across two nicely-raked flower-beds, and through the shrubs, after the terrified rabbit; and away after him rushed the young man, who had been standing for some time idly gazing on the setting sun. Much scrambling and shouting followed, and then the dog and his young master re-appeared, the latter out of breath, with glowing cheeks and disordered hair.

"You lazy old hound!" exclaimed the young man to the ancient setter: "will you let your master's pinks be eaten up, and not stir a foot,—you who have eaten from his hands so long? You are getting indolent and selfish. Is that the consequence of age?"

"Probably: age brings wisdom. Why toil for what is not worth the winning? To whom is gratitude due in this world? I have fed old Rover for *my* pleasure—not for *his*."

Edward started at the voice: he had not expected an answer.

"I did not see you, sir," he said, respectfully, and in some slight confusion.

"Then you expected old Rover to defend himself? Truly, youth is wise!"

"It is at least active;—and the lazy old hound deserved reproof for not defending your property."

"Despite the danger of incurring your contempt, I prefer the quietude of the old, to the over-activity of the young. The rabbit might have eaten my pinks;—the puppy has trodden down my snowdrops and anemones. I could have borne the open enmity of foes; but the falseness of friends! —it was that which crushed my heart—which made me loathe my kind!"

The bitterness of the speaker's tone riveted the attention of the young man. Though accustomed to such occasional bursts, they were so clearly the irresistible outpouring of a tortured spirit, that they could never be heard unmoved!

"Look there!" resumed the elder Elton, after a pause, with his usual measured tone.

Edward did look, and saw the puppy, whose activity he had been lauding, coursing round and over the beds, puppy-like, with a flaunting piece of rag in his mouth, stolen from the cook, who stood at the other side of the lawn scolding and calling. Young Rover stopped to give the rag a shake and a tear; then, perceiving that he was observed, sprang into the middle of a bed, and out again, scattering the mould in every direction, and bounding towards his master with such ludicrous antics, that, though much provoked at the mischief done, and the smile of his companion, Edward could for the moment only laugh at his gambols.

"I am happy to say, sir, that your favourite anemones have received but little damage," observed Edward, rejoining his father after having quieted the puppy, and restored the flower-beds to their former order, without the slightest assistance from Mr. Elton, who had looked on in perfect silence and seeming unconcern, not even approaching to ascertain what evil had been done.

"As you are such an advocate for gratitude, am I to thank chance or young Rover for the very judicious manner in which he gamboled?"

"You are severe, sir," replied the young man, evidently hurt at the tone of the remark. "A puppy will be a puppy;—warm young blood will sometimes race a little violently through the veins; you would not have it stagnate as in that old hound? Action!—give me action! a stirring life!—not an objectless existence, a dull monotonous being!"

I was not formed to be a dial, stuck in the centre of a squared garden for the sun to shine and the wind to blow on. I would be ever doing."

Mr. Elton gazed keenly on the ardent youth, whilst his own look was troubled, and then resumed his usual composed and placid tone.

"There has been enough done for one day to satisfy even your activity. Suppose you and your spirited coadjutor re-enter the house; my flowers would repose in greater peace if they knew you safely housed."

The young man, though not without some show of impatience, followed his father and the old dog, who walked quietly beside his elder master into the sitting-room, whilst young Rover proceeded to the kitchen, doubtless to apologize to the cook for running off with a portion of her apron.

"Mr. Elton took up a book: his son did the same, threw it down, and then watched the clouds from the casement.

"Ha! the wind is getting up, and the clouds driving furiously across the sky. We shall have a wild stirring night,—a morn of life. I hate one of your dull, sombre, soulless days, when you may hear your own heart beat, and watch an hour for the moving of a leaf."

His father looked up at this burst with a sigh, and his tone was sad. "What! that calm and lovely sunset, which I admired but so lately, gone?"

"Quite gone, sir. We shall have wild weather."

"And you seem to rejoice. Have you any scheme in view it can advantage?"

"Not I, sir; I wish I had, having no taste, like old Rover, for an indolent and do-nothing life. It is too cold to fish—besides that is but dull work; shooting is over, and I am weary of hunting out every creak and cranny in the mountains, frightening the wild birds and the lizards. I have counted the trees on the hills, and the stones in the hollows, and noted every patch of heath and furze, till I am weary."

"A profitable employment!" remarked Mr. Elton drily.

"As profitable as dozing away life before the fire; pointing to the old dog sleeping on the hearth.

"Poor old Rover seems in particular ill favour with you

to-day; yet methinks his employment is nearly as profitable as yours."

"It is not my fault, sir, that I am not more profitably employed."

"What would you do?" inquired his father in a lower tone.

"What would I do!" repeated the young man, glowing with eagerness. "I would forth into the world to run the race with my fellow men, to seek their good, to win their love, to satisfy the spirit that burns within me,—perhaps to write my name on the roll of my country's glory."

"I knew it would come to this!" murmured his companion, as the young man paused for breath.

For some moments he yielded to the conviction of the certainty, then roused himself to oppose it.

"You judge unwisely; there are too many as it is to run the race of life; you would be trampled on and crushed. None but giants of wealth and rank succeed, whilst thousands perish unnoted and unknown. Glory! the empty bubble on the stream of time! it bursts, and leaves no trace. Seek the good of your fellow men! do so, and they despise you;—do not so, and they hate you. Win their love! they know not the meaning of the word: there is no such thing; it is but a fancy of the poet's, the dream of the young, the mist of the early morning veiling the rugged features of reality, and dispelled long ere the noon of life. Satisfy the spirit that is within you! you would but cast fresh fuel on the burning pile. Boy, you understand it not!—how should you? What know you of the brooding storm of doubt, the tempest of the passions, the mutiny of mind, the vortex of despair; the rebel thoughts that will not calm, but rage and riot till they win the mastery; the memories that will not hush, although you say, "Be still!" but crowd upon you like relentless foes, mocking and gibing when you bid them go. And you think to still these by fruition! Fruition! it may come to common minds, for they have common wishes; they may have fruition—they may not even feel satiety. But there are spirits to whom fruition cannot come! You do not know yourself; you pamper the spirit, and then think to chain and bind it with links which will not fit—with bands which will not hold. Wave after wave leaps madly on, and so has done for ages;—will the ocean cease

- to flow ? Cloud after cloud sweeps madly through the sky, and so has done since time began, and yet the wind is raving now. Hear me, boy ! There is a spirit in you—the spirit of unrest :—check it, curb it ;—give it not way one single inch ;—teach it not to conquer by your yielding ;—force it to be still—compel it into peace ! Once let it forth, and no barrier shall control it. You know not what the contest with your fellow man would be : better seek friendship from the serpent of the waste—better contend with the ravening beasts of prey. Remain unknowing and unknown—seek content—banish these idle dreams."

"I cannot, sir, even if I would. It is not the passing fancy of a moment; it is the sateless desire of the heart: it is eating life away—will depart only with that life. This very desire for action causes what you name; it is charactered by its own flame, my life's monotony its fuel, and burns more fiercely every day. I cannot chain, I cannot bound it ; and if I say 'Depart!' it lingers still. Let me go, sir."

"You will not heed the warnings of experience,—you mock at the advice of age. Boy, I repeat, you will repent it."

"I will bear the evils I would brave. Bid me forth with your blessing."

Mr. Elton shook his head in sadness as he looked on the animated pleader.

"Would you leave me, Edward, lonely, desolate, again to feel the heart a waste—this earth a desert ?"

"No, sir," replied the young man, springing to his side ; "I would have you go forth with me."

"Again encounter with my kind ?—again combat with the wily, or the ravening beasts of prey ?—again be torn, again glut them with my misery ? Ask it not."

"For my sake ! Surely you judge harshly; or if not, we shall be together—we shall combat side by side," pleaded the eager youth.

"I tell you it cannot be. I will forth but for one purpose. Go, if you will leave me :—I ask you not to stay."

The animated glow passed from the young man's cheek, and after a struggle his cherished hopes were abandoned. His tone was as touching as had been his appeal.

"No, sir ; I have said I will not leave you."

"Bless you, my boy! And you will still this spirit of unrest?—you will be contented in your peaceful home?"

"I will try;" but the lip quivered as it pronounced the words.

The father pressed his hand in silence, and the young man turned away.

"Read to me, Edward," said his father, later in the evening.

His son rose with an assumed alacrity at variance with his late melancholy listlessness, and without a question took the first book which came to hand. It was the *Iliad*—the very last work to bring rest to his spirit of unrest—to reconcile him to the monotony of inaction. It is the very genius of action; and the more he became interested in the deeds of its heroes, the more galling did he feel his own compelled quietude. A burning spot came on his cheek, and his voice rose or fell; his tones were harmonious or bitter, as his thoughts turned from the poem to himself. His father read his mind.

"We have heard enough of Homer for to-night. Suppose you try these essays."

Edward tried them without a comment; but his reading was now as monotonous and spiritless as his fate. The author could not fix his attention, and his thoughts wandered far away.

"That will do," said Mr. Elton, with a deep sigh, and the book was laid aside.

There was a long silence: the father looked on the son, but the son looked on nothing.

"Edward," said Mr. Elton at length.

Edward started, and answered without looking on the speaker.

"What would you, sir?"

"I cannot bear to see you thus."

"Bear with me for awhile, sir. I will retire now, and hereafter try to be all you wish. It is something to give up the desire of a life, though that life has been but short."

"I do not ask you to give it up."

Edward looked eagerly into the pale, sad face of the speaker. The hair had been gray from his earliest memory! the frame slightly bent, the brow deeply lined, and the fea-

tures strongly marked, as if characterised by some fearful shock; but their general expression was a commanding calmness, as if the mind had subdued itself. There were occasional bursts of passionate bitterness, though these were rare; but such a moving expression of mingled sadness and resolution he had never seen before.

"What mean you, my father?" he asked, taking his hand.

"This, Edward: that you shall hear the story of my life—the history of my wrongs. If you will then go forth to those who made a desert of my Eden,—a crater of my heart, I will not stay you."

"I will go forth to avenge those wrongs."

"Peace! be still! Would you join with the tempter? I have struggled,—I struggle yet with the fiend. Vengeance is not for man! Would I could subdue hate and contempt! but they pour their burning lava on my heart, drying up its gentle springs. Tempt me not again. I would not doubt the Creator's justice."

The young man shrank back rebuked.

Mr. Elton leant with his head against the mantelpiece for a few moments, and then resumed—

"I have long seen that this hour must come, though I have striven as the dying strive for life to put it off. It has come!—you can know rest no more! The golden age of hope is past, the iron rule of experience must succeed, and peace has passed for ever. That young heart is boiling up with its hopes and desires: it will not be still again till those hopes have been crushed,—till those desires have consumed themselves. Listen to me, not with the ear only, but with the heart; let the mind, too, hear and weigh,—then shall you be the arbiter of your own fate. Perchance you may heed the warning of my tale; or perchance it may be labour thrown away, and the wounds of by-gone years be bared to your sight for naught. It matters not; the history shall be told,—you shall learn that I once felt as you now feel. Once felt, say I? Have those feelings passed away as a driven cloud or a passing breath? No, no! though in my pride I boast, at times, I have subdued myself. Look on the sky to-day,—it is calm and cloudless, and the gentle breeze is of a summer softness: to-morrow comes,—the tempest raves, the heavy clouds are driven

through the air. I have seen your eye upon me, fixed in wonder at my unnatural calmness, as your quick spirit deemed it. It was unnatural! either a frozen seeming, whilst passion raged beneath, or the fearful calm portending or succeeding to the storm,—the horrid lull, the chilling torpor of despair. The wildest winter follows the hottest summer. Ever distrust those who show such calmness: they are not what they seem, or what they should be; they are the scathed ruins of the war of passions, not to be garlanded with flowery wreaths, or they are cold-blooded deceivers. Trust not these,—nay, trust none. Ay, boy, trust none!—not even me, your father,—your sole tie on earth,—he who has nursed your childhood, and would fain guide your youth,—trust him not. Why should you, since he dare not trust himself?"

"Hush, sir, I entreat?—speak not such fearful words!" said his son, soothingly, looking with anxious affection into the speaker's haggard face. "Say not so: you can never deceive, or I would still bless you if you could. Do not speak of the past,—or not now—some other time. Defer it till a calmer moment."

"Calmer moment! There can be no calm in connexion with the past,—no peace till memory shall fail. What is the present of this world?—what can the future be while the past is an eternal Etna, pouring out burning torrents? And you would forth to win such a past! Look you to it, boy! When the present tempts to sin, think there must be a past,—an ever-living, an undying past, weaving in its colours with the present and the future. Think of me,—think if the past, when no crime wrought its darkness, could thus bow down, thus ever wring by its bare memory,—think what a past would be the work of your own guilt, not woven by the guilt of others! Defer the tale!—defer nothing—not the gathering of a flower, the uprooting of a weed. The one will fade ere you inhale its odours; the other, gain a giant strength, and germinate, and bring forth thousand-fold. Now,—now must the tale be told! I could not check the torrent even if I would. Remove one barrier of the mind, and who shall stay the cataract? The hopes and the fears, the deeds and the sufferings of by-gone years, rush on my mind with a whelming force, and the words must forth, or the heart would burst. Now, heed me, boy."

His son could do no other. The rushing force of his story must have compelled the attention of the coldest and the dullest,—must have moved the most insensible. The eye could not withdraw its gaze, the ear could not cease to hear,—the listener almost feared to breathe, lest he should lose a word.

CHAPTER IV.

"You see me now bent and worn; the bright curls silvered; the smooth brow deeply lined; the flashing eye grown dim; the smiling lip compressed, lest moans should force their way. Think you I was always thus? It was the working of one day—the stamping of one shock! Think of me once as you are now;—with the glossy curls, and the smiling lip, and the gleaming eye, and the bounding step; the heart that dreamt no guile—the spirit buoyant with its bright hopes, basking in a present to which futurity seemed dull. Such was I in youth! rich, joyous, courted,—loved, I deemed in my simplicity, by all. What am I now!—a wreck! a desolate ruin! None turn to me in friendly guise, none flatter, and none love. As I was, so are you in heart, though not in circumstance. As I am, so may you be. Who made me what I am?—men! with whom you would hold communion—to whom you would forth with confidence and love;—woman! in whom you would trust—in whose flatteries you would sun yourself. Shelter the serpent in your bosom! cradle the tiger in your arms!—do this, but trust not man or woman.

"I stood forward in the world, an object of applause and regard. All would have envied, had they not loved me; so said a hundred tongues, and I believed. They sped the shaft—I sheathed it in my heart. They only spoke—but I gave credence to their words. I had known no suffering—at least none worthy of the name. The petty sorrows of my early years had passed away, leaving no painful memory behind: they had worn no trace on the young heart; they had come and departed as rain-drops flung from the eagle's wing. My parents died when I was too young to feel their

loss. My guardians had been honest, and riches, that I deemed unbounded, were at my command. The home of my fathers, too, was mine—an unsullied name—spirits which never drooped—and a heart that, like the brilliant creepers of the Western World, flung its flowery wreaths on all around its path, decking the worthless and the rotten, as the precious and the sound, in splendours not their own. I was the favourite of fortune—he on whom Nature lavished all her bounty, the cynosure of every eye—the admired of all admirers, the loved of each. So said the crowd that pressed around me, with their bright eyes and brighter smiles, their soft and glowing words. So said all; or the whispered tone of dissent was too low to meet an unheeding ear. So said all, and I believed them. Why should I not? Could eyes and lips deceive? Was I not wise, discreet, and generous, as they said? And how could they fancy to deceive the wise—mislead the discreet—bring ruin on the generous? Oh no! they said the truth, and I believed the flattery of my own heart, more inebriating, it may be, than the flattery of others.

"If wise, discreet, and generous—above all, wealthy, what wonder all should come for counsel or assistance? Since all were friends, what wonder if I granted all they asked? What is wisdom, if it guide not the less wise? What is wealth, if it bring not joy to those we value? I counselled, and I gave; and eyes flashed brighter, and lips lauded louder than before. If any murmured, they murmured not to me—all left me looking satisfied. How could people talk of self as the universal guide of man? of wo as his universal doom? of wearing away existence? of being alive, and yet not living? of deceiving, or being deceived? I knew no wo! I was exempt from the universal doom—my life was life indeed! I lived every hour—every minute—neither deceiving, nor deceived. Who said these things? Sour fanatics, neglected poets, disappointed ambitionists, creating an atmosphere of gloom and heaviness, and then complaining that all was dark, and they could not see,—heavy, and they could not breathe! Grumblers at evils, instead of overcomers; passive victims of their own moody fancies—workers out of their self-spoken dooms. Mine was the wiser and the happier creed.

"I felt for all, but there was one friend to whom I was

more closely bound. A harmony of tastes, a communion of thought, a general sympathy, seemed to link us in bonds that time would only draw the closer, and that no chance could burst. We were as one in heart—as one in mind, though I was gay and prosperous, and he was grave and poor. I loved him as myself—and he deceived me! Should I not say, trust none?

"I loved, and in the blindness of love saw, would see, no error in the idol whom I worshipped with the homage of a young warm heart, pouring out on her the force and beauty of a first passion. In my eyes, the world held not a jewel worthy of her wearing. I wooed—I won—though others sought her. I listened to her whispered words—I stood beside her at the altar—I plighted hand and faith—I claimed her as my own. With the pride of a world's conqueror, I bore her to the beautiful home of my forefathers, and that home was as an Eden!"

The speaker paused, then proceeded more rapidly, as if fearing to linger on his tale, lest his powers should prove unequal to the task.

"For a time my bliss was perfect—my bride all that my doting heart had dreamed. My friend approved my choice, and my wife approved my friend. Oh, happy man, with such a wife and such a friend! And I strove to heighten their regard—idiot, madman that I was, who would not see what others saw! Your mother placed you in my arms—my friend became your sponsor, and I was more than blest! I would have staked my life on that wife's love—I would have perilled limb and fortune to have served that friend.

"My wealth was not as boundless as I thought. Knavish and inefficient agents—false friends, who would not, or unfortunate friends, who could not repay what I had lent, all tended to embarrass me, and an interview with a person residing in the North, became an act of necessity. The fond wife wept, and I kissed away her tears. I dwell not on details: enough, that a bank broke, one pretended friend, for whom I had been bound, became a bankrupt, another absconded with a large sum; the interview was delayed by various circumstances, my absence lengthened to more than double its intended time, and I found my affairs less promising than I could have believed; in fact, I was little better than a ruined man, unless those could repay to whom I

had afforded such munificent aid. At length I prepared for my return, but with a troubled and foreboding mind, for my wife's letters had been shorter and less frequent than I had hoped, and in moments of despondency I had fancied them cold and constrained. The nearer I approached the home I had left so blest, the lighter became my heart; every apprehension passed away, and there was no gloom to dull the anticipated joy.

"Within a few miles of that home dwelt a gentleman whom I esteemed but lightly, though the world spoke loudly in his praise. I had sold him land and lent him money, for my dislike was but a fancy. On him I was to call by appointment. I found him courteous and friendly, as I had ever found him, and ready to pay some of the money due, whilst he requested a few days' delay for the remainder, if I could grant it without inconvenience, showing cause sufficient to induce me to comply with the request. He thanked me warmly, urging me to stay for refreshments, which I declined, giving as a reason my impatience to return to my wife and child, more especially as I had heard there was an apprehension of riots in the neighbourhood. He no longer pressed my stay, but remarked with a smile, which did not please me, though I understood not why, that I need be under no alarm, as my wife had a friend who would be sure to provide for her safety. Impatient to reach home, I pushed my horse to his utmost speed, thinking a little tenderness in one of his fore feet arose from stiffness, and would wear off; but his lameness increased, and I found he had run a nail into his foot, which I could not extract. I was without attendant, such being my custom. I led the poor animal, though fretting at the delay, for the lonely cross-road I had taken left little hope of meeting with assistance. A boy, crouching under a hedge, was the only human being in sight. As I approached, he came forward and placed a letter in my hands.

"Rage and indignation were my feelings on reading its contents,—not against my wife, but against the author of the slander, who bade me be at such a spot in my own grounds, at such an hour, when I should see the false friend whom I believed was with a dying relative, meeting the wife of my love in secret, by appointment. I gave no credit to the tale—no, not for a moment,—but swore justice on

the vile slanderer. A paper, which had fallen from within the one I had read, lay at my feet; I picked it up, and these words were traced on the outside: 'This will prove the truth of the writer's information; and he who is wronged, knows how to right himself.' I opened it; and then, and not till then, were my doubts awakened. It was my wife's writing: I could not be deceived in that, though I tried to disbelieve the fact. I closed my eyes—I would not look upon the words of shame; but the characters glared out before me! To believe was worse than madness—to disbelieve, than folly. The note was directed to my friend, who had taught me to believe he was with the dying, far away. It contained these words:

"I will be in the arbour walk to-morrow evening a little after seven. My husband will not return till the following day, and your presence in the neighbourhood is, I still hope, unsuspected. I entreat you to be cautious; the happiness of her who loves you depends on your prudence."

"There was no signature—there needed none. I stared wildly round for the messenger, but he was gone; nothing was to be seen but a horseman at full speed, crossing a field in the direction towards my home. He was too distant for me to distinguish accurately; but hate proclaimed what sight left doubtful: that horseman was my treacherous friend, speeding on, no doubt, in full security, as I had fixed the following day for my return, fearing that I might not arrange my business sooner, and willing to give my wife a pleasurable surprise.

"When the first effects of the shock had passed, I hurried on towards the place of meeting; but could not reach it till after the appointed time. The false wife and the false friend were already there. I crept through the shrubs till I was near enough to hear words that fell on my heart like the searing iron on the open wound. My stealthy step had not disturbed them; and there I crouched, glaring on the faithless pair, drinking in, with the thirsting spirit of revenge, each tone that proved my wrongs. He was before her, looking into those very eyes, into which I had looked to read their tale of love, holding that very hand plighted to me, and me alone, in the sight of Heaven, and pleading earnestly, passionately, for some boon, on which he declared his every hope of happiness depended. The tone would have

told that love was his theme, had not his last words come with torturing distinctness on my ear.

"Grant me one more interview—to-night or to-morrow; I ask but one to plead my cause. Will she whom I love refuse me this? Why not fly with me at once, and thus break bonds hateful to both! It must—it shall be so: I swear I will not leave this country without another meeting. No one but nurse knows of my being here, and I can enter unseen, knowing the house so well. You cannot, you will not refuse me?" he pleaded still more passionately. I listened breathlessly for the reply. It came: the tone was low and tremulous; but I heard every word. 'I will not refuse you, though dreading that some evil may ensue. Should my husband by chance return, or should others see you—' 'Deny me not for such simple doubts and fears. My future happiness or misery is in your hands. Would you see me die before you, or, worse, pine day by day in hopeless wretchedness?' You cannot be so dull at an excuse, if my friend should return before he named: say any thing—his love is too confiding to admit a doubt. I will be in your dressing-room by twelve, and, in the mean time, shall prepare all things for flight. I quit not the house alone.' 'I still fear,' murmured his companion; and then she spoke so low, I could only catch the unconnected words, 'Fiery spirit—will not quietly submit—death may ensue.' 'Fear nothing for me or others,' replied her paramour, in the eager tones of love and hope. 'To-morrow we shall be beyond reach, and no farther secrecy will be required. How shall I repay you?' 'Let me see you happy, and I ask no more; but be prudent, for my sake.' 'I will; and nurse can be relied on.' 'Fly, sir, fly! some one comes!' exclaimed the nurse, rushing from a sheltering thicket. My eye was on their movements: I sprang forward to slay them as they stood, at the moment of their guilty plotting. They fled; but my arm appeared endowed with more than mortal power, and the avenger was behind them. Heedless in my fury, my foot caught in the tangled brushwood, and I fell. Before I had risen and recovered sense and thought, false friend and wife were gone. I listened breathlessly: there were footsteps in an adjoining path. I staggered forward, for my foot was injured by my fall, a pistol in my willing hand.

"Follow me! there is yet time!" exclaimed the gentleman with whom I had parted some few hours before.

"Whither are they gone?" I demanded. "I seek vengeance!"

"You must first seek safety," he replied, leading me deeper into the shrubbery as he spoke.

"My wife!" I exclaimed, trying to free myself from his hold.

"—Is hastening towards the house, followed at a distance by a muffled figure, who affects concealment: you must seek safety by some other road," replied my companion. "Some bond for a bankrupt has become due, and the bailiffs are even now in sight. I heard of your peril, and galloped on to overtake you, judging from our late conversation that present payment was beyond your power; whilst all are not so willing to be bound for others as yourself. Come with me; your servants do not seem aware of your return, and I will show you a safe asylum till you can make arrangements."

"No, no!" I shouted; "I will on, though thousands should oppose me. They shall not meet to-night!—they shall not escape my vengeance! I will upbraid them with their guilt, and destroy, or be destroyed!"

"Ha! has it already come to that? I knew not it had proceeded so far," remarked my companion.

"So far! Then you suspected?" I questioned, fiercely.

"I have heard rumours, but refused belief, knowing that you doubted neither wife nor friend."

"Then the whole country knows the tale: yet you would stay me. Back! and let me on!"

"I burst from his grasp; but my will was stronger than my power:—my injured foot failed to support me, and I should have fallen but for his arm. I had never liked the man; but in my hour of need he did me service: he guessed my meaning from my incoherent ravings, and calmed me for the time, leaving me the hope of future vengeance. To proceed to the house was to ensure my detention, (having no present means to redeem the bond,) and leave the guilty time and freedom; so, yielding to his arguments, I consented to accompany him, and remain concealed, at least till night. With his assistance, I reached his horse, which was tied to a tree at a little distance. Meeting the nurse with

my sleeping infant in her arms, I insisted it should accompany me:—never again should it rest near the false heart which had betrayed its father. Remonstrance was vain, and my frenzied wish was accomplished. My child could not have deceived me; to all else, my love had turned to hate. Threats silenced the nurse's objections, and I bore my child before me on the horse, which my companion aided me to mount.

"I know not by what lonely paths we reached the cottage that was to be my hiding-place:—my senses wandered, and days elapsed before I could even crawl to the window to breathe the fresh pure air. The sudden shock had been too much—one hour had destroyed the happiness of a whole life! Hope and confidence were gone;—distrust and despair had become the habit of my mind, varied only by bursts of frenzied rage! I demanded madly, why I was spared?—why life had conquered in the struggle, when death had been a blessing? During my delirium, the treacherous wife and friend seemed ever before me! I see them now, as I saw them then; and the fiend rules in my heart when I think upon them, as they stood in that calm summer evening, plotting my shame and agony! I, who had loved and trusted them, and would have given life for either!"

Mr. Elton covered his face, whilst his son pressed his hand in his with earnest sympathy. It was some moments before the speaker resumed his tale.

"I was spared for years of suffering—sufferings that, I fear me, have been borne with pride rather than submission. The titled and the wealthy, with all the luxuries of life around—its pleasures all before them, with skill and gold at their command, become the prey of death; whilst, in a wretched hut, upon a hard uncurtained bed, with bare cold walls, and no attendant but a simple woman, I, a struck and blasted tree, for whom none cared, lived on! And why? It was His will—I know no more; for I had welcomed death—wished not for life. Will time reveal a reason?—or eternity alone proclaim the bond that linked me still to being?

"The mistress of the cottage, to whom I had once shown some kindness, nursed me with a poor but willing gratitude; and he who had led me thither assisted as he best could, without revealing my retreat. Before I could tread on the

green turf, and gaze upon the clear blue sky, (both hateful for their bright and happy look,) the objects of my vengeance had departed!—gone!—none could tell me whither—but gone together, the morning after my return. So well had the guilty laid their schemes, that I could learn no traces of their flight, or I would have followed to taunt them with their guilt. The woman guessed the thoughts that were crowding on my brain—evil thoughts, and placed you in my arms, whom she had tended as carefully as she had tended me. You smiled; your little fingers clung to mine; and my heart still owned a tie to earth.

"Disgusted with my kind—shrinking from again encountering those who, basely flattering in the hour of wealth, as basely blamed when ruin came, I resolved to retire from the world, leaving unexplained the mystery that, in the eyes of the many, enveloped my fate. An enemy had obtained possession of the bond, urging the law to its utmost tyranny. There was enough to satisfy his claim, and I yielded without a struggle, rather than hold communion with my kind. But, though resolved to rear you in seclusion, some means were requisite. I would not mingle in the bustling scenes of life, for I hated man; and I could not stoop to be a beggar. I had lent money to one deemed frank and honourable, but held no legal acknowledgment; there needed none from one so highly principled, and the recent death of an uncle would enable him to repay me without inconvenience. This, joined to the sum I had already collected, and what I should receive from him who had provided for my safety, would more than satisfy my humbled wishes. I thought I could trust the frank and generous hunter; and to him, with an injunction of secrecy, I revealed the place of my abode, hinting a probability of my leaving the country, and requesting the repayment of the loan. In due time came the answer—brief, cautious, cold; he would pay the debt when I should produce its legal acknowledgment. He knew I had it not! In my wrath, I would have abandoned my concealment, braving detention and the sneers of the rabble rout, to show him to the world the villain that he was; but he who had before preserved me again came forward, offering to advance the money. I accepted the offer, assigning over to him, in return, after the payment of my debts, all to

which I was entitled : my signature being witnessed by the woman of the cottage and some stranger brought for the purpose. To baffle all endeavours to trace me, the deed, at his suggestion, was dated the day of my visit at his house. He placed the money in my hands, received my thanks, and took a friendly leave, promising his services at any other time, should I require them, though my manner was rough and ungracious, and I refused to tell him of my future plans. I should have felt more grateful ; but gratitude comes not always at our bidding, and I liked him not. I doubted—hated all ! The friend of my youth had entered my Eden—tempted to evil, and deceived me ! The wife of my bosom had given the love plighted to me to another !—the frank and generous spirit I had trusted played the cheat !—those I had aided showed not common honesty !—and the herd, who had so lauded, sneered and mocked ! My name was a by-word and a jest ! How could I trust again ?

“ Carefully disguised, I left the cottage, yielding in anger to the entreaties of my hostess that I would depart sooner than I had intended, and leave the neighbourhood immediately. What evil she apprehended from my stay, I could not guess ; but she might be said to thrust us from her door, so eager was she for our going, and I marked that she watched us as though fearing our return. The way was lonely—the sum I carried considerable, and I had taken care to make my pistols fit for use,—I have remembered since, against the inclination of my hostess : yet I had paid her liberally, and she had been a kind and careful nurse. With a bundle at my back, and you in my arms and calmly sleeping, whilst I suffered tortures, (for this departure appeared the realizing of a misery which had seemed before but as a dream,) I set out on my melancholy journey. It was evening—darkness coming on ; and this, joined to my disguise and the change wrought by suffering, left no fear of recognition.

“ I had proceeded some distance without encountering a human being, and, lost in thought, paid little heed to the wildness of the way, (a dreary waste with scattered brakes,) when the hollow tramp of a coming horse speeding over the heathery sward recalled my attention to the present. On came the horseman, heedless of the ruggedness of the

track, either unconscious of the peril, or too intent on some purposed act to be turned aside by a dangerous road. Night had set in. Save the coming horseman and his steed, neither man nor beast were in sight, and there was no habitation within miles; we were man to man on that dreary waste; I ill armed, not in full health, and embarrassed by the guarding of a helpless child. I had lately, too, learnt lessons of mistrust, and there was that in the muffled stranger, as he rode directly towards me, the moon bursting from behind a cloud and gleaming full upon him, which was little calculated to inspire confidence. I had but just time to place you on the ground and prepare for defence, when the horseman came within pistol-shot. For an instant he seemed to waver; the next, something held in his extended hand glittered in the moonshine. There was a whizzing noise in the air beside me, preceded by a bright flash, and followed by a loud report. The horse had shied, and his shot was harmless;—not so mine. Before he could reach me, a fearful imprecation proved my aim and suspicions of his personal enmity alike correct. The practised horse stood still,—the rider's head bowed to his neck—his hands clutched at the mane, then relaxed their grasp, and the body fell to the earth with a dull heavy sound. I raised the head, loosened the crape, and sought to give him air. He half rose—glared upon me with a look of baffled rage—uttered a deep groan, and sank into my arms—a corpse.

"I was vexed that my aim had been so sure—I had but fired in self-defence—I felt no enmity towards the dead. What was the evil which he had sought to do me, compared with the wrong wrought on me by a friend? I had no hate to waste on petty injuries. Till I looked on you, my child, I was little thankful for my safety. The hollow tramp of a second horse in the same direction roused me to action. It was probable that the approaching horseman was a comrade of the fallen man's, and I had no wish for a second encounter. Taking you again in my arms, I sprang on the robber's horse, which was quietly grazing near, and galloped towards a wood at some little distance through which lay a path to the river. The fine animal did his best to repair the evil which his master might have done me; the hollow tramp of the following horseman

sounded fainter and more faint, and long before I reached the river, was entirely lost to my eager ear.

"Stepping into a small fishing-boat, whose mooring-place I had learnt in happier days, I rowed out into the broad clear stream that showed a tranquil face, flowing calmly on in its gentle might with scarce a murmur, and drifted down in the current with silent oars, keeping the shady side and avoiding the moonlight, till I had passed miles on my course. There was neither rock nor fall to stop my way, and I dreamt of no obstruction, till my little boat was suddenly upset by striking against a rope stretched across the river. A good swimmer from my youth, I succeeded in saving you and the money which was about my person; but the bundle and some of your wraps were borne away by the current. You suffered nothing from the accident, and we reached this retreat without farther peril. Of those who wronged me I have heard nothing—their names have never reached my ear, have never passed my lips; and I have sworn that they never shall, save to warn or advantage you, or should chance throw them in my way. Vengeance is no longer a sateless thirst—I have striven with the tempter, I seek to shed no blood; but were that false friend before me, I could not answer for my acts. You have often deemed me cold and insensible: you know not the fires that consume me, while the brow is calm. You see not that this very outward calmness is but the seeming lull of the mind's storm. Your young blood riots in your veins—you sigh for change—you would have all feel as yourself; you know not yet the tyranny of passion—you believe not in the perfidy of man. I would school you to a saner mood—would teach you to rely upon yourself, and scorn mankind; but my own sudden bursts ill second my desire. You only bind me still to life—earth holds no other in whom my heart can feel an interest. Will you, whom I have cherished with a father's care, unclose the scarce seared wounds of by-gone years, bringing fresh tortures to an unhealed heart? Speak! you have heard my tale; will you, too, prove ungrateful, and betray?"

"Believe it not, my father," replied the agitated son, pressing his hand affectionately as he looked upon him with his glistening eyes. "Think not I can forget the fostering care of years."

"Then you stay with me, and lay my head in the quiet grave. You will not forth among the friends of earth. As I—so do you hate and scorn your kind."

"We will hope that all are not alike," replied the young man, hesitatingly, evading an answer to his father's wild appeal.

"Hope it not! All are alike! the only safeguard is self-interest. Love will not bind! and gratitude does not exist! I have spoken—can you dream of faith, of honour, still? Then have I told the history of my wrongs in vain—in vain renewed the pangs of years long past. You take no warning from my words—you feel not for a parent's injuries."

"You wrong me, sir," said his son, warmly, again taking the hand which had flung his aside. "Most deeply do I feel your injuries; and you must see I do. I will consecrate to you the life you saved—I will wear my years away in inactivity, if you so wish; but do not ask that I should hate and scorn my kind."

"And why not, boy? Have I not cause? Have you not cause, if you feel my wrongs, as you would have me think you do? Were those wrongs petty wrongs?"

"Not so, indeed! But though some did evil, all are not guilty: one whom you liked not, proved your friend; and one poor and destitute, unbound by kindred, watched and nursed you with untiring zeal."

"And, it may be, set the robber on my path, when she could win no farther guerdon. And that sudden and providing friend, might he not, too, be working for his own good?" replied his father, fiercely. "And that false wife and falser friend, and the cautious debtor, have you no excuse for them?" he continued, bitterly: "can you not pale their guilt, till it appear the hue of innocence?"

"I wish to pale no guilt; but my mother—I would gladly, if I might, believe her other than you say. How could she have so changed in the short period of your absence? Forgive me, my dear father,—I would not pain you, but I have pined for a mother's love, a mother's fond caress, and envied those thus blessed. And when, in answer to my simple questions, you said I had no mother, I thought of her as an angel dwelling beyond the sky I looked upon; and I have seen her in my dreams, my guardian and my guide. I

cannot bear to link her name with shame. May you not have been deceived?"

"Deceived, boy! Would you madden me by doubts of my own sanity? Did I not hear her fix the time of meeting, and connive to lull my doubts? Take you your father for an idiot or a liar?"

"Ask me not such cruel questions! I do but wonder how, once loving you, she should have changed. I do but wish that you had spoken to her.—Do not look so sternly on me. I have often wondered at your seeming coldness—been vexed at your change of mood. Say you forgive me—I little guessed what wrongs had wrought these things. I will not seek communion with my kind, since you desire it not: to hate and scorn them all untried is beyond my power."

"You would not use the power if you had it."

His son made no reply, and there was silence for some minutes. The strong excitement awakened by the recital of his early sorrows passed gradually away, and Mr. Elton's features approached more nearly to their usual calm expression, though the occasional lightening of his eye proved his passion but in part subdued. He was the first to speak, after gazing keenly on his son.

"I blame you not, Edward," he said, kindly, seeing that his son was sad at his reproof. "In my younger days, with every other blessing, I too sighed for a parent's love—a mother's neck whereon to weep—a mother's tones wherewith to sooth. I blame you not.—But words are vain: let us speak no more of the past—let us think only of the future. Plead not for your mother—my own heart has pleaded for her till I was bowed with shame at that heart's weakness. I heard with my own ears the words that made my paradise an arid waste. If the past cannot be forgotten, let it be unnamed: I doubt not your regard, and time has proved mine. I am no hard taskmaster, requiring compliance merely for my own will: I value not submissive acts, while the heart cherishes rebellious thoughts. Let us speak as man to man, not as a father to a son. I ask nothing from your love: I would convince your reason. You offer to remain. Do you say this because my tale has worked as I would have it work? Have you learned to see man as he is, tyrannous in

power—wily in his weakness? A life of inactivity, as you have named it, say, would it bring peace, or weariness?"

"I will remain—I pray you to let that suffice."

"It does suffice," replied the father, as he turned away.

When he spoke again, his manner was as it had been for months, ever since the young man's first expressed desire for activity,—a mingling of coldness; tenderness, and sarcasm.

"You shall not abide with me: the body might be here—the spirit would be far away."

"You should hear no murmur, sir. You said you blamed me not; and, in time, I may control my thoughts, though I cannot now."

"And never will, if you yield your wishes and your passions sway till they have grown to tyrants. You may check the stream, you cannot bound the sea. One wish fulfilled, another comes; and the wild wearying chase is never done—the excited spirit knows no rest. Peace is but irksome quietude; youth knows no happiness but in the inebriating whirl of action,—it will not see that the whirlpool overwhelms and wrecks. You must go forth, boy, to learn wisdom for yourself—you will not learn its truths from others. You will not take your father for your tutor: experience will prove a surer and a sterner teacher. Do not deprecate! do not seek to change my will! I was weak enough to hope it might be otherwise: I now see my folly, and am resolved. I condemn you not, I would rebuke myself. If, with the strength and experience of manhood, I cannot tame the fiery passions of my youth,—and that they are not tamed, my sudden bursts have proved,—how dare I to blame you? I would warn as one who has erred, and errs, rather than reprove as one who offendeth not. You scarcely admit it to yourself, you would not allow it to me; but still the thought is in your heart, that there was some defect in my judgment—some want of wisdom in my acts—or my hearth had not been desolate, my bosom wrung, and that you could win a happier fate. Deny it not—the thought is there! Marvel not that I have read it in your changing features. Can aught blind love? They err who say it cannot see—it sees too clearly for its peace. You will go into the world full of bright hopes, and brighter fancies, and rich dreams

of love to all mankind; you will return to seclusion a withered and a blighted thing, despoiled of all that gives to life its beauty and its laugh! The butterfly sports in the bright summer sun, flitting from flower to flower;—what so happy? Ere evening comes, it is the spoiler's prey—crushed, bruised, its beauty gone,—or tortured to delight some scientific Nero. And yet, I say, go forth, for it must be so! May you learn a gentler lesson, and find gentler teachers!"

"Send me not away in anger!"

"I send you not away in anger, but in pity."

"Would that I could tempt you to go with me, then!"

"Seek it not!" interrupted his father, with something of his former wild excitement. "I will not again hold communion with my kind, unless you stand in peril: hate and scorn, passive in seclusion, would become active in a crowd: I might seek to rend, as I was rent. No! leave me to brood in silence and in solitude."

"I have pined for action,—sighed for a stirring life—some object for my rising energies; and the passion grew the stronger from your opposition: but now that you would grant my wish, I shrink from its fulfilment. I would not leave you alone and desolate, who have watched over me so tenderly. Let me abide with you, and I will strive to lay this spirit of unrest."

"Do you shrink from trial, misdoubting your own powers? Have you learnt to prize a calm won without encountering the horrors of the previous storm?" demanded his father, gazing eagerly into his son's face as he laid his hand upon his arm.

"No, sir!" replied the son with an energy and flushing of the cheek that made the questioner draw back with a dulled look; "I shrink from no trial—I doubt not my power in any mortal struggle; or, if I perish, there would be one of little value gone, whose life had been worthless, actionless. I have no sudden love for monotony, but I would not leave you to your gloom: to win you back to cheerfulness shall henceforward be my motive."

"It is ever thus with youth: daring, presumptuous, doubting neither others nor itself, it judges actions by their glare. The patient martyr, whose glories are not blazoned forth, is, in its view, as nought. Eager reformer, too, of

others, you would check my gloom, but leave untouched your own impatience. Enough that I bid you go. Self-knowledge is not learnt in solitude: where none oppose, the will becomes a tyrant. You must learn from suffering a wiser judgment of your powers. Youth, presumption, and inexperience, fit you but ill to cope with man, much less with heaven. You will not find yourself the conqueror in every mortal struggle; you will learn that you cannot rule your destiny as you imagine: you are not alone, but a tiny link in the great chain of society—a paltry item in the plan of Providence. Why am I as I am? Why are thousands as they are, if our will alone could rule our fate? Was I weak and indolent, when you are strong and active? You may launch the bark; but will it speed on its course in spite of wind and tide? Can man command the sky?—the sea? Or if he could, shall each distinct one of the pigmy millions rule without a thought of general good? If so, the earth would be a fiercer field of tumult and of wrong than the wise hold it now. You are a clear-seeing philanthropist, I doubt not; yet you might chance to tangle the web of fate inextricably."

"I deserve your reproof, sir, and submit," replied the young man more humbly, his cheek crimsoned at the sarcastic rebuke. "My words were rash—my acts might be the same; but if I only spoke of my own power in the sudden flush of pride—if I appeared to trust in my own arm alone, the boldness was but in my words: I dare not the Eye that sees! I defy not the Arm that guides!—I would not use the energies I have, to bear or to avert, as the Almighty wills. Though I would not submit with sluggish indolence to obstacles that activity might overcome, I would act in submission to the Bestower of those energies, which I would not waste in idleness. I may not control by my mere will; but, by God's grace, I may turn events, all adverse though they seem, to work me good."

"Right, Edward, if your heart but felt its weakness as deeply as you would fain have me believe.—Nay, boy, start not at my words! That proud look ill suits your humble speech. A loyal and submissive subject in your words, there is rebellion in your heart: I see it, though you see it not; and more, the blame is mine. I have borne my fate in pride;—I have submitted, feeling the impotence of weak-

ness;—I have bowed, and not always humbly, as before a tyrant,—not knelt as to a loving, though rebuking father. And when the maddening memories of the fearful past have rushed upon my mind, I have rebelled, asking with haughty mien,—‘Why am I thus tortured? am I more guilty than my fellows?’ We have much to learn—it is my impatience which has partly made you what you are. Look that you,—rush, bending even to the summer breeze,—presume not on your own power—and say not to yourself, when far away,—‘My father would have guided me—himself he could not guide.’ Take warning, and not license, from that father: you have not been tried, as he was tried; bereft of all at a single stroke, when years of prosperous fortune had ill fitted him for the reverse. Be warned by the advice, and pity the adviser. Take heed that you come not back with a seared and worldly heart, a bitter and a gloomy spirit, without my suffering to explain—I will not say excuse them. Talk no more of remaining here;—it shall not be! I may perchance learn more submission in your absence, for it frets me when I see you chafing at seclusion. If I have spoken harshly, heed not the outbreaking of a tortured spirit, whose former agonies have been renewed by their recital. Return to me sobered and contented; bring not upon me fiercer suffering by your rashness. I would that you should lay me in my grave.—Now tell me of your plans.”

“I was to blame, my father, in this matter: I was too proud, too daring: but do not think I can forget your care and love. You are agitated; let us speak of my plans at some future time.”

“No: arrange all now. I will retire for a few minutes to regain that calmness which I knew not could be thus disturbed;” and pressing his son’s hand affectionately, he quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

IMPATIENT as the young man had been for months—nay years, to enter on the life of action now before him, he did not find his father's absence long, so absorbed was he in the history of his wrongs. Man though he was, he would have thrown his arms around him and wept for pity; but there was that in Mr. Elton's demeanour, even whilst depicting his pangs, which had checked the impulse. With all his regard for his son, (and it was little short of dotage,) his heart, characterised by its sudden shock, made stern by its cruel wrongs, could not condescend to the tenderness of love; it had all its power, but none of its beautiful weakness, as the stern and the cold might term those attaching nothings of affection which link hearts in bonds that time cannot sever. Awe and respect, if they did not chill the love of his son, stayed its expression. It was a lovely flower checked by a nipping wind: the flower still lived, but it wanted warmth and shine to make it bloom in all its beauty—to give its petals their colour and their fragrance. It was this which had caused him to sigh for a mother's fondness as more gentle, more endearing—the loveliness of love! It was this, too, though scarcely admitted, which made him, whilst indignant at his father's wrongs, unwilling to allow his mother's change, and he was still striving to reconcile contending feelings, when Mr. Elton re-entered the room, with a countenance paler and calmer than usual, and wearing a softer expression than his son had ever seen it wear before.

"Now, Edward, for your plans: if I cannot admire their wisdom, I will endeavour to make clear their folly without

bitterness, of which I fear there has been too much of late. The truth is, I have long foreseen to-day, and fretted at a necessity which I could not avoid; thus hastening what I might not prevent. Your means can be but scanty, foreseeing, as I do, that they will bring no return, and that you will require from me food and raiment hereafter. My name had become a by-word and a jest before I retired to this seclusion, as I learnt from the discourse of many who knew me not in my disguise, and had I the will, I have not the power to influence one to serve you. You must depend on Heaven, and on yourself. With health, strength, and a knight-errant's spirit, you must go forth to seek adventures, and win wealth, honours, and your lady love, as in the olden time. I know you expect all this,—now how do you set about it?" inquired Mr. Elton with a kindness in his raillery he seldom showed. "What! silent, Edward?" he continued after a pause: "are you frightened already? I thought you boasted months since of a well-ordered plan."

"I am not alarmed at danger; but now, when called on to declare my plan, I fear that it may not meet your approbation—you will hardly think it wise—we see things so differently," replied his hesitating son in some confusion.

"In plain words, you dread my raillery," said his father, mischievously; "and this fear promises but little wisdom. Out with it! I have engaged to be merciful, and you are generally unchanged by ridicule; indeed with a generous sympathy, you hug more closely those hopes and ideas jested on by others. Are you for a journey to the sun?—of course you are no lunatic. Produce the chart, and we will study all the routes, and decide upon the best."

"Nay, sir, you promised to be merciful," replied the young man, recovering from his embarrassment. "You always had a cruel pleasure in demolishing my airy castles."

"Fortunate for you that they were airy, or you would have been long since crushed beneath their ruins! If not to the sun, whither would you?"

"To London."

"To London! Ay, Whittington went thither. To court, of course: you will be prime minister before a month. The office of court fool has been abolished, I believe?"

"I fear it has, sir, or with your recommendation I should hope to obtain it."

Answered in a good spirit," replied his father, joining in his smile. " If that light heart could outlive the storms of life, sages might envy you. But you think I am paying little heed to my promise of mercy, so proceed with your aërial structure, and I will refrain from applying the battering-ram of ridicule till the last story shall be raised. How do you go to town ?

" On foot. I heed no fatigue, desire to see something of the country, and am not in a hurry to reach my destination, as Carswell will not return from Ireland this month."

" Carswell ! So you go to him ! And what may you purpose to achieve in London ? I think he said his uncle was a merchant. You will keep the leger well, having a peculiar talent for business of all sorts !"

" I do not intend to become a merchant. Carswell's father is a solicitor, employs many clerks, and, through his son's interest, I hope to be received into his house, or enabled to procure some other situation."

" A lawyer's clerk ! A life of action, truly ! A glorious field of enterprise ! Perfect happiness, to be chained to the desk all day, digesting digests ! A far pleasanter life than bounding over the hills at your own will and pleasure ! A right sober plan this for taming a wild spirit !"

" I have little choice, sir : I am too old for the navy, and have neither means nor interest for the army."

" True, boy ! so I must be contented to see you chancellor, instead of admiral or general. Ha ! I have touched you ! you strike at no ignoble game."

" I hope to obtain an honourable independence and be of some advantage to my fellow men, and to effect what steady perseverance can effect," replied his son in some embarrassment.

" Only an honourable independence, the fruit of steady perseverance ! Moderate ! But I will not catechise too closely. So you go to Carswell, trusting that he will advance your views ? You will be a rich man within the year, for you take all things on trust."

" You forget, sir, that I had a letter from him not three weeks since, inviting me to town, and offering his own and his father's services."

" No ; I have not forgotten that he wrote to request you to send him a settler, and to free himself from the obliga-

tion, in a gentlemanly way, said civil things, and made civil offers. In your simplicity, you think the letter an original; it is but a copy: I have seen a thousand such."

"Both profess gratitude for the slight services I rendered them."

"I cry your pardon! that places the matter beyond a doubt. A hot-headed boy takes offence at a circus; and one, little less rash on most occasions, but better tempered than, turns the riot with a jest, and saves the quarreller a drubbing: an equal degree of restlessness produces a friendship, (lasting, of course;) and, as much of course, the father and son will substantially prove the unbounded gratitude they profess. A marvellous virtue, gratitude!—with an equally marvellous memory! The other youth, calling himself Robert Forman, whom you chose to defend against odds on the highway, and afterwards supplied with money, is a proof of this. The money, which he would take only as a loan, has been returned fourfold, has it not? No wonder you depend on the gratitude of Carswell and his father!"

"This is too severe, sir; you would have done as I did, had you seen a stripling attacked by two armed and mounted highwaymen,"

"No proof of wisdom, if I had," remarked Mr. Elton sarcastically.

"As for the money," continued his son, without heeding the observation, "I told him I did not want it, and bade him keep it. I would stake my life on his honesty, and intrust greater sums to his charge, feeling certain of repayment if in his power."

"It is to be hoped you have a cat-like number of lives, Edward. Stake your life on the truth of a stranger picked up on the road, known for eight-and-forty hours; and who was shy of speaking of his family! You do indeed take all things upon trust; but follow my advice, for the future, and do not lend on the same doubtful security."

"And this is the indulgence that you promised to my plan, sir," remarked the young man warmly, annoyed by the sarcastic observations of his companion, though that sarcasm was uttered in a less bitter tone than ordinary. "You demolish my aerial castles, as you term them; without the slightest pity. I agree with the author who says, that those who condemn and destroy, should prove their skill

by erecting a superior structure; it is barbarous to leave me thus without a sheltering roof."

"I would build you a substantial mansion; but you disdain so common-place an abode, and call the style monotonous!"

"I rather fear that you would build me a palace of ice, cold and benumbing."

"As the palace of truth would seem to your deluded mind. I would but fit you for the temperature of the world."

"I should be frozen to death, sir, before I had become acclimated; I could not exist below zero. What other plan, sir, would you propose?"

"A shrewd question, and a little puzzling. I have no other plan to propose; he who takes the journey should count the cost, since he must pay the penalties."

"Then you do not disapprove of my plan; notwithstanding all your raillery."

"I could not have framed a wiser to compel you to admit the truth of all my warnings. For gratitude——"

"Nay, sir."

"Well, well, Edward, I own I have been hard upon you, and you have borne it with better temper than I expected; so let the matter pass; I shall make no farther objection. Depart this day week; write to me,—not all you feel—I cannot expect that, but write to me as one who will grieve, not triumph, should his warnings be fulfilled. And now, good night: a father's blessing rest upon you!"

CHAPTER VI.

It was a bright, happy-looking morning when Edward Elton, declining the attendance of young Rover, and shaking hands with the fat old cook, the corner of whose apron was held to her eyes, left the retired abode of his childhood, and passed out into the world to mingle in the busy scenes of life—to meet its trials, and to bear its pangs.

From the night when his son's departure had been resolved on, till that preceding its accomplishment, Mr. Elton had never willingly alluded to the subject; but on that night the parent and his child sat long in solemn but affectionate talk, and after its conclusion both remained in silence; hand clasped in hand, till the former, mastering his emotion, spoke of the folly of delaying a farewell which must be said, and abruptly embracing his son, and uttering a hurried blessing with an unsteady voice, left the room, having before arranged that they should not meet again in the morning.

Mr. Elton had spoken that night as if the truth had come upon him, that rebellion had been raging in his heart whilst cold and unfelt precepts of submission had issued from his lips. His bursts of passion had shown little of Christian meekness—his dark opinion of mankind little of Christian charity or forgiveness. His sufferings had been great—his wrongs wrought by those whom he most prized;—love and friendship had proved delusions;—and what were life without those blessings, real or believed? Let him not be judged too harshly; the time may come when he may

judge himself more hardly than his greatest foe. Let him who has borne such pangs, and borne them with cheerful submission, say, "I am better than thou." Such would not say it, for such would know how hard the trial. His dark opinions of mankind were scarcely lightened; but on that night, if he spoke not with love of his fellow-men, he at least brought his scorn less frequently and offensively forward. Either the feeling had formerly been exaggerated in its expression to check his son's desire to mingle with the world; or softened by that son's departure, he was inclined to speak more kindly of those beings with whom he was so soon to mix; ceasing to declaim against man, perhaps, with a vague fancy of thus propitiating his favour towards the inexperienced youth so shortly to learn his real worth; or, more probably, too much absorbed in the prospect of losing the idol of his heart,—the only sunshine of his life, to bestow abuse on others. His warnings against trusting to idle professions, or being led by specious words, were valuable and judicious, and more effective as being so slightly tinged with his ooden bitterness. Alarmed at the perils which might assail his son if launched upon the stream of life with too great a reliance on his own powers of withstanding evil, and ruling events by his own will, the more so from feeling that such had been his own thoughts in youth, he strove with all the eloquence of an anxious parent to point out the danger of the young heart's pride, and to enforce a real, humble dependence upon his Maker.

"Teach the heart to feel, my son, what the lips have, I fear, but idly spoken. Say not to yourself, 'My father murmured—he rebelled, and yet he preached submission': the error of my ways should furnish warning, and not taunts. I will not plead to you my pangs: there is pride in my heart in my desolation, as in my splendour;—though I bent the head, the haughty heart has not been bowed. I have talked of Christian submission—I have only acted this world's fortitude. I humble myself before my child to save him from guilt and sorrow—I admit to him what, as yet, I have scarcely admitted to myself. Behold the triumphs of a father's love! the pride of man is bowed before it! Heed my words, and bring not on my head the sin and shame of having led you by example on to evil."¹⁴

His son was greatly moved; he passed from his father's

presence with a more humble mind; the presumptuousness of youth was checked, and his prayers that night were the sincere outpouring of a rebuked and chastened spirit.

It was long ere the sleep he courted came; and when it did come, it was dull, heavy, and unrefreshing. Either he had not dreamt, or the only portion of his dream that lingered on his memory was a dim vision of his father bending over him. Had he known how that father had knelt beside his bed that night with murmured prayers—his eyes fixed on his sleeping son—the tears rolling unheeded down his sunken cheeks;—had he heard his but half-checked sobs, when, returned to his apartment, he listened to that son's preparations for departure, stealthy as they were;—had he known as he crept on tip-toe to his parent's door, that that parent slumbered not, but stayed his grief lest the listener should catch its sound;—had he guessed the might of that love whose outward marks were so sternly repressed:—the son had thrown himself on his father's neck, and they had not parted. But he knew nothing of all this—guessed not how much his absence had been deplored, and passed from his childhood's home, and his childhood's guardian, in the belief that after the first few days his absence would be little heeded. He doubted not his father's love, but he knew not its extent—how often he had been watched for, when he thought his return but little wished.

The pang of leaving his home and his father for many months once conquered, he went on his way with a bold and buoyant spirit, blessed with a heart naturally kind and generous, a temper not easily provoked, uniting quickness and perseverance; and a mind humbled by the tutoring of the night before. In no hurry to reach London, he cared not diverging from the direct road when lured to do so by any interesting object. A ruin or a mountain, a river or a stately mansion, a wooded dell or a gentle stream, each won his admiration, and turned his steps from the appointed way. Of fatigue, save sufficient to ensure a good night's rest, he as yet knew nothing; no remorse for the past, no cares for the future, disturbed or prevented his slumbers; petty troubles troubled him not, and he had a smile and a kind word for all he met. His portmanteau had been sent on to Wexton to wait his arrival, and the bundle slung at his back did not prevent his aiding the loaded wayfarer—

the little child passed contentedly from its wearied mother's arms into his temporary protection ; the aged grandmother thanked him for bearing her pitcher from the well ; and his frank and kindly manner won him a welcome even from the churlish. His was one of those happy minds which find or make a perpetual sunshine around them. Wealth ! rank ! genius ! what are they in comparison in the scale of blessings ? Even health, if such a temper is not the perfection of health, the harmony of every organ, is not of equal price. The natural sunshine of the mind is the highest blessing—the greatest talent, for which man has to be thankful and to account.

Some days had passed, yet his heart was as light, his step as bounding—his anticipations of success, and his hopes of hereafter inducing his father to quit his seclusion, as strong as ever. The little difficulties he had encountered and overcome had excited, not depressed him, and he was devising the best means of clearing some inhospitable fences, and approaching a noble-looking, though evidently uninhabited house, on which he had been gazing for some time from a lofty and partly wooded hill, when a voice beside him startled and made him turn.

"Perhaps, sir, you would like to walk in the grounds, and see the old house ?" repeated a pleasing-looking young man above the common class.

"Thank you, I should very much like to do so," replied Edward Elton with the frank good-humour so irresistible. "To whom does the place belong ?" he inquired as his companion, unlocking a gate, admitted him into the park.

"To Mr. Garnier, sir ; and my father has the care of it.

"It is the most beautiful spot I ever saw," remarked Edward Elton, after frequent pauses to look and to admire. "I have been wandering round the outskirts for some time, thinking that if I had the privilege of the three wishes, the possession of that residence with a suitable fortune would be one. It is a scene of such rich and varied beauty ;—that full broad river flowing calmly on in its silent might; those rocky cliffs, sublime in their naked grandeur, or softened by the brushwood crowning their summits or clinging to their sides; that ancient wood with its deep shade ; the verdant lawn, and the stately mansion with its touching look, as if of a ripe old age :—yes, I should certainly live

here. In spite of being untenanted, there is a happy look about the house and grounds; as an autumn day when the storm has fallen, and the sun is going to burst out from behind a cloud.

"It is very much admired by all the walking gentlemen who come to draw it," remarked his guide, a little proud of the praise, and glancing at the stranger's sketch-book as he spoke. "But, for my part, I find it very lonely. It is a dull place, and I want to see the world; but my father and mother won't hear of it."

Edward smiled at his poetical burst having given rise to the idea of his being a wandering artist, such as he had sometimes encountered in his long walks round his secluded home, and then moralized that, even here, on this spot so lavishly adorned by Nature, where he had dreamed for an instant of fixing his abode, content was not an abiding guest. The young man pointed out in the grounds all he considered worthy of notice, and then offered to show the stranger the interior of the mansion; an offer thankfully accepted by Edward, whose interest was strongly excited by the ancient building and beautiful scenery, as well as by his young guide, whose longing for change and an active life had created a sort of sympathy between them.

"Always wanting the keys to show some one over the house and grounds, instead of minding your work!—be sure your idleness will come to no good, James," replied a shrill female voice loud enough to reach Edward, who was waiting in the passage for his guide's return.

"Nonsense, Aunt Judith! you have so often told me I shall be hanged, that I believe you wish it may come to pass, and prove you a prophetess. Let me have the keys now: when I am as old as you, I dare say I shall be contented to sit in the chimney-corner, and never stir out."

Aunt Judith was beginning a grumbling reply, perhaps a refusal, when Edward stept into the room with a gay—

"Good morrow, dame! I am so taken with the outside of this old house, that you must not refuse me a sight of its inside; and if there is work to be done, I will lend a helping hand. Shall I begin by moving back that table for you? laying hold of one lately displaced to facilitate cleaning.

"Who are you?" cried the old woman, in a tone of min-

gled surprise and terror—(at least so Edward thought)—turning towards him, and gazing on him with eyes whose dimmed sight prevented her discerning more than the general outline of his figure. “Who are you?—and why do you come here?” she demanded more vehemently, impatient at the delay in answering occasioned by the young man’s surprise.

“Edward Elton—a stranger—never here before, and on my way to London,” he replied good-naturedly. “And now tell me why you asked so impatiently, and seemed so alarmed at my entrance?”

“Yes; I might have known that it was not?—that it could not be.”

“Who did you think it was?—and what could not be?” demanded Edward eagerly, his curiosity much excited.

“The thief who robbed the hen-roost the other night!—but I might have guessed he would not venture to come here,” replied the woman promptly, but in a tone of such excessive ill-humour as left it doubtful whether she spoke the truth, or invented a falsehood to annoy him.

“I certainly did not rob your hen-house the other night, though half-tempted to do so just now—the fresh eggs looked so inviting,” replied Edward gaily, though disappointed at her reply. “I must coax you to dress me a couple or so, whilst I look over the house.”

“Begone!” said the woman harshly. “This is no Public for wayfarers.”

“But you will serve me for love, instead of hire. Positively I depart not without staying my hunger,” he added, encouraged by her nephew’s signs: “nay, I have set my mind on your telling me some stories of old times. I like to hear of the past, and want to learn all about the former owners of this house.”

“And what should I know of the past, or the former owners? I have nothing to tell!” replied the woman sharply, with a sudden glancing round the room.

“Not tell of the past! Oh, fy, aunt, to say so, when you often talk of old times, and look so awful that I am quite frightened!”

“Be still, boy!—You will come to evil yourself; and then you too will have a past!”

The last words were spoken in a tone so strange and hol-

low, that her hearers were silent, only changing looks of surprise; and, after a pause, she spoke again:

"Why do you bring strangers here, James, as idle as yourself? Go!"

"Not till I have seen the house and tasted your eggs," replied Edward good-humouredly, resolved on carrying his point despite the woman's churlishness.

"There, then, show him the house, and make haste," throwing the keys towards her nephew.

"I knew you would relent:—and the eggs will be ready on my return?"

"If you will not go without. But mind, boy, you bring in no more strangers: no good will come of it."

"I hope no harm will happen this once," remarked Edward, amused at her fears: "I am neither thief nor highwayman!"

"Highwayman!—who talks to me of highwaymen?" she demanded wildly, drawing up her bent figure, and looking as keenly as she could on the speaker.

"You had better come and see the house at once, sir, whilst the eggs are getting ready," interposed her nephew; and Edward, from delicacy towards the young man, complied with his wish, though interested by the woman's manner.

"Your aunt appears a singular person," he remarked to his young guide, who, after a moment's hesitation, answered frankly,

"That she is, sir; and no pleasant temper to deal with! She never likes strangers, or to be asked of the past, though sometimes she will tell old stories by the hour together. She is always odd; but I never saw her so odd as to-day."

"Has she ever been stopped by a highwayman?—she seemed so alarmed at the mention."

"Not that I know of, sir; but she can never bear to hear the word. She is some years older than my mother, though not so old as she looks, having nearly lost her life in a brain fever, and never quite recovered her eye-sight. Some say that her husband, who died years ago, was as bad as need to be; but she never speaks of him, and we were living many miles off then, in peace and plenty. My father was a thriving farmer, and I was to have been articled to an attorney,—but crops were bad, rent high, prices

low, my father was bound for a friend who could not pay, all our goods were seized, and we were beggars! My father went to Mr. Garnier, whose tenant he had once been; and that gentleman offered him to take charge of this house and grounds, and see that the tenants did their best by the farms. So we all came here; and instead of being a clerk with Lawyer Sims, I am obliged to keep the accounts, and sometimes work in the farm."

"—And show gentlemen over the grounds, in spite of your aunt."

"Yes, sir; and I am glad to talk with any one, for it's sadly dull, seeing nobody but father and mother, and aunt, who is as cross-grained as may be. I wonder that you coaxed her out of the eggs: I never knew her so strange and yet so obliging before."

"Suppose I try to make her give me a night's lodging besides?"

"That you will never do, sir; I wish you could; but I will make you as comfortable as I can without her—though I can't promise much, for she keeps all the keys. If my father was at home, there would be no trouble in the matter."

"I will try my powers with your aunt. Does Mr. Garnier never reside here?" looking round admiringly on a beautifully-proportioned though unfurnished apartment, whose range of windows commanded a fine prospect of the extensive park and majestic river.

"I don't think he ever has, sir, since the first year he had it—before I was born."

"And how many years ago is that?"

"I am just seventeen, sir; but I believe it was some time before that."

"And what caused him to leave it and not return?"

"Some say it was haunted by the ghost of the unfortunate gentleman who owned the place before."

"Why haunted?—tell me: I have a great fancy for ghost-stories."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed, sir, for I know little worth telling, only what some old people in the next village say; and it was so many years ago, some tell one thing, and some another. I have always thought that Aunt Judith knew more than she chose to say, for sometimes she

lets out things as though she had been here at the time; but ask her a question, and she is crosser-grained than usual, pretending to know nothing."

"At least, tell me all you have heard."

"Readily, sir; but it is a strange confused story at the best. They say that the gentleman who lived here before was a fine generous heart, kept open house, and never turned away even a dog from the door without something to eat. I don't know how he was ruined, but he was, and his beautiful wife, too, who doted on him, and who, all the old people say, was an angel, if ever there was one upon earth. The gentleman went to a distant part, and no one ever saw him alive again. Most think that he made away with himself, because he was ruined. His beautiful lady left the country just after, and died of a broken heart. Mr. Garnier took possession of the estate, and came down to live here; but he heard strange noises and met the poor gentleman's ghost, so soon went away again for good and all. Some say Mr. Garnier did not come by it quite fairly, and once loved the beautiful lady;—but he has been a kind friend to us, and I would not speak any thing against him."

"What was the gentleman's name?"

"Beauchamp, sir; all agree in that—almost the only thing in which they do agree."

"And Mr. Garnier has never been here since?"

"No, sir; nor ever will, I think. He has had all the handsome furniture removed to his other house, where he lives in fine style; but he never looks happy, to my fancy,—and his children all die off, one after the other."

"It is a sad pity that such a house as this should be left unoccupied! Are there any more rooms?"

"Only one, sir,—Mr. Beauchamp's own room, where they say the ghost walked: and there is a picture there—the only one to be seen, for Mr. Garnier had all the old family paintings put into a garret, and the door nailed up."

"Why so?"—that seems strange!"

"I don't know why, sir; but I have heard that he did not like to see them."

"How beautiful!" was Edward Elton's sudden exclamation as his companion, throwing open the door of a small room, gave to his view the portrait of a female in early youth, the light shining on it with a splendour of effect that

must have contented the artist, though he had been the most fastidious of his race. "What touching loveliness!—the beauty of the heart imprinting its magic power on the perfect features! One could love such a woman at once and for ever; she has a charm above mere beauty!"

A but half-suppressed laugh from his companion at this sudden burst of admiration recalled the speaker to a sense of the want of wisdom in his rhapsody; and he joined in the merriment at his own expense.

"I was sure you would admire it, sir; all who see it do,—though they do not look and speak like you. Mr. Garnier ordered that it should be taken care of."

"Whose portrait is it?"

"Mrs. Beauchamp's—the lady who died of a broken heart."

Young Elton was strangely annoyed at the information. The portrait looked so full of the spirit of life, that, at the first moment, it seemed scarcely possible to believe that that spirit had been destroyed, and that one whose beauty appeared something more than earthly should have already submitted to a mortal fate, before the colours portraying her loveliness (a loveliness that the heart would fain believe, could never wane) had faded, or grown dim from age.—To die too of a broken heart! Surely it could not be!—who would inflict pain on her? He cherished a sort of poetical belief that she was still alive—that they should meet; and, with a folly which not even the poetry and romance of one-and-twenty could excuse, he expected to meet her as he saw her semblance before him, unchanged through the course of seventeen years, and more besides, as his guide assured him. Nay, he had the simplicity to fancy that, by some chance, when they should meet, there would be some link of sympathy between them. Well might his father seek to sober him!

"How do you know that she died of a broken heart?" he asked abruptly.

"I have heard my father say so; but I did not go to the funeral—not being born," replied his young guide gaily, amused at his eagerness.

Edward still continued to gaze on the picture, till compelled to descend to the hall, where his eggs were prepared, by the woman's violent ringing of an old cracked

dinner-bell, and the remonstrances of James, who knew his aunt's temper would be soured by delay.

" You can look at it again, sir, after your dinner," was the most efficacious argument in inducing Edward's compliance.

Whilst eating the eggs,—which, to do aunt Judith justice, she had dressed as might have pleased a *gourmet*, had such a being existed in those hospitable days, when the quantity more than the quality of viands was considered,—Edward sought by thanks and gracious words to win his hostess to the furnishing of some farther particulars respecting the family of Beauchamp; but his endeavours were in vain. Either she looked upon him with a sudden and startling gaze, inquiring why he desired to know, at the same time denying all knowledge; or she turned from him in sullen silence, which no questions, no thanks, would induce her to break. The graces of his manner, generally so irresistible from its warmth and frankness—the showing of a kindly heart, that as yet knew no guile and had nothing to conceal, was here thrown away; it neither won nor softened her; and when he expressed a wish to spend a night at the house, offering handsome payment, her ill-temper arose to little short of fury, till, to save her nephew from her wrath, and an act of disobedience,—for he admitted that his parents had left strict charge not to let any stranger sleep beneath the roof during their absence,—he gave up the design, and promised to depart after taking another look at the portrait which had excited so deep an interest. To this also Aunt Judith most strangely and strongly objected, demanding sharply what the picture could be to him? and as she had possessed herself of the key of the room whilst he had been discussing the eggs, and would not yield it, save compelled by absolute force, which neither of the young men chose to employ, Edward found himself obliged either to give up the point entirely, or submit to a compromise. After some debate, during which the woman's words and manner confirmed her nephew's hint of derangement, she consented to his having one quarter of an hour's farther look at the picture on his positive promise that he would, at the expiration of that time, quit the house and premises without farther parley. This was only accorded on Edward's peremptory declaration that he would not depart without another

sight of the picture; and Aunt Judith took her station before the clock to minute his absence, and ring the dinner-bell the instant the time should have expired,—and all without assigning any more plausible reason for her churlishness than the possibility of the stranger's proving a thief, a suspicion which neither of her hearers believed she really entertained.

"Very well, Judith," said Edward Elton gaily, yet half petulantly; "depend upon it, I return in the night and carry you off for this uncivil behaviour."

"I wish you would," muttered her dutiful nephew; whilst the dame herself took no notice of the laughing speech.

"Could any man feel so oppressed, so crushed by ruin or by wrong, as to throw away his life whilst the love of such a woman was still his? That love should have been earthly good enough. None but a selfish coward would have left her thus to stand alone against misfortune!" exclaimed Edward Elton when again standing before the portrait.

"Blame not the dead! Speak not of that which you do not know! Judge not as God, while you but see as man!" said a low, and sweet, but solemn voice; so sweet—so solemn, that it came upon the ear with spell-like power.

He started at the voice, turning quickly round, not aware till then that his guide had left him. Beside him were two ladies, one in black, standing a little in advance as though she had just moved towards him, but so fully cloaked and closely muffled, that to form an idea of face or figure was beyond the power of the keenest eye. Before he had recovered his surprise—could ask a question or make a defence, the lady, clasping her hands, uttered an indistinct murmur, and would have fallen to the ground, had not the young man sprung forward and caught her in his arms. Bearing her to the window, which he threw open, he was on the point of unclosing her hood to give her air, when her companion stayed his hand, saying as she did so.

"May I request you to withdraw? My friend is subject to these attacks, and, leading a secluded life, is always distressed at meeting strangers. Leave her to my care, and she will soon recover."

Curiosity and humanity prompted him to press his services; but they were so peremptorily declined, with such evident impatience at his presence, that he was obliged to

leave the room without a sight of the fainting stranger's face, whom, without sufficient reason, he identified with the speaker.

"Will you be kind enough to send the woman we saw below, with a glass of water?" requested the lady who had urged his departure.

He promised acquiescence; and before he had left the gallery into which the room opened, he clearly distinguished the door bolted behind him.

"Is there a spell in the house that affects all who enter?" thought Edward as he descended the stairs;—"all the females, at least, for stranger ones I never met. Or has the spell been cast on me, that I am suddenly become so unprepossessing and terrific?"

"I was just going to ring the bell," said Aunt Judith as he entered her room. "Now begone!"

"All in good time: but first, there is a lady fainting in the picture-room, and you must take her up a glass of water directly."

"Not I," replied the woman sulkily; adding instantly, "And what could she faint for?"

"Because she could not help it, I conclude," replied the young man with a smile.

"People don't faint for nothing—and in that room too!" muttered the woman with a look of fear.

"What do you mean?—Why should she faint?—Or what is there particular in that room?"

The strong interest expressed by the questioner's manner recalled the woman to her former charlish answers.

"How should I know why she fainted, or what is in the room?"

"Who is the lady?"

"How can I tell? She came here in a chaise, and paid money to see the house; and you might have looked at her as much as I did."

"I saw nothing of the face of the fainting lady; and her companion would not let me lift her hood. There is something strange in this matter; and it is odd, too, that you should let them go over the house, when you are so anxious to turn me out."

"There is nothing small enough up there for a woman to carry off."

"Thank you for your good opinion!—but I tell you what, Judith, you know more of this matter—ay, and of others too—than you choose to tell; and that looks ill."

"I tell you I know nothing!" replied the woman with passionate vehemence. "Get you gone! it is past your time."

"What will you take to let me stay another hour?"

"You shan't stay a minute!—you promised to go, and go you shall, if I call in the men and dogs to turn you out!" exclaimed the woman, excited to little short of frenzy by his opposition. "Will you go, as you said you would?" approaching the window, looking out into the yard as she spoke.

"I must keep my promise if you will not be bribed to indulgence. Only let me stay till you have returned from taking the glass of water to the lady, that I may hear how she is."

"No,—I will not take the water till you are gone;" seating herself in her arm-chair with an air of dogged resolve that gave no hope of change.

"If I must go, I must—with few thanks for your hospitality, and many wishes for your better humour when next we meet."

"Which I hope will be never," she muttered as he left the room.

She watched him and James, who had joined him at the door, out of the court, and then went for the glass of water.

In vain Edward Elton sought to satisfy his curiosity concerning the strangers. James could learn no more from the post-boy, than that they had arrived in a chaise at the nearest town, from which they had taken another to bring them to Beauchamp Park; and that they paid handsomely, and asked no questions. They had come whilst Edward was contemplating the picture; and the shortest—not the one who had fainted—had offered so large a bribe, that Aunt Judith had given them instant permission to wander over house and grounds alone and at their pleasure. To her nephew's surprise, they instantly proceeded to the late Mr. Beauchamp's room, as though they had been there before; and on remarking this to his aunt, she had appeared uneasy.

Farther information being beyond his reach, Edward was fain to be contented with his ignorance; and after offering remuneration to James, who declined it a little indignantly, the young men parted with mutual good wishes, the former expressing regret that he could not assist his obliging guide in his desire for employment in some gayer spot.

It was Edward's intention to proceed to the town from whence the ladies had arrived, with some idea of obtaining a sight of the fainting stranger on her return; but directions are seldom clearly given or implicitly followed, and Edward was surprised and annoyed, when, at the close of the day, he found himself, on inquiry, some seven miles from the place where he had intended to pass the night. Before he resumed his journey on the morrow, he decided that Aunt Judith's past would probably not bear the scrutiny of the present; and that, as her nephew had hinted, misfortunes had in some degree bewildered her ideas, as well as soured her temper. Of the strange ladies, all he could determine was, that their conduct was extraordinary; and that by no means satisfied his curiosity, so strongly excited by the rebuke of his hasty judgment, and their evident desire of concealment. Were they old, or young? and what was their purpose in coming? He did not know, and he was more vexed at his ignorance than was wise or agreeable. But we can sympathize with his vexation, hating a mystery undeveloped, or a secret withheld, above most other things. It is so very annoying not to know every thing; and so very inexcusable now-a-days, since the publication of the Penny Magazine,

CHAPTER VII.

It was a day in March,—a beautiful day—that is, for hunting. The sun was not so bright as to dispel the scent or the mist: the one lingered in the valleys,—the other hung upon the hills, like gauzy curtains half withdrawn. There was no blue in the heavens; and the faint breeze from the south fell on the brow as a soft and dreamy sigh.

A young man looked down from one of the hills into the vale below. In the distance was a long line of hunters, fading to the view as they turned the base of an opposite hill, their cheering hollos falling every moment fainter on the ear. Between them and the young man (the hollow fall of their horses' hoofs on the smooth, hard down, sounding like the rumbling of some subterranean stream,) were seen a few scattered horsemen, headed by a fine-looking man on a large and powerful horse, needing neither whip nor spur to urge him in pursuit of some two or three couple of hounds, that ran the scent without check or stop, with a speed that proved them true to their instinct, and left little doubt of their ultimate success, though their victim was not as yet within their view. The young man looked eagerly down from the height, and as the bold hunter in the front, on his gallant bay, swept swiftly past, he bounded down the hill, joining in the chase with the eager impetuosity of an ardent-spirit. His slight but well-formed figure seemed fitted for exertion; every limb was firmly set, every sinew strongly strung: inured to exercise, he was as imbodyed action. Never weary, scarcely slackening his pace, on he ran by the side of the foremost hunter, most of whose followers were

lagging far behind, their horses breathed by a deep fallow field, that the young man had escaped by his descent from the hill, which placed him beyond it.

"On my word, you are a gallant runner, and deserve to be in at the death! Cut across that field,—you can burst through the hedge by the old oak there, and you will save a mile: I must go round," shouted the hunter.

An animated look towards his adviser spoke the young man's thanks, as he availed himself of the direction. On swept the chase, and on followed the young man, cheering the hounds; for no one else was in sight, the stragglers having given up the pursuit, whilst the bold hunter had not yet reappeared. A slight check gave the runner breathing-time, and a view-hollo caused him to turn to the right. There was the hunter, waving his hand impatiently, and shouting loudly.

"There—by that brake—lay the hounds on the scent!"

The runner did as he was directed, with the promptness, if not the skill, of a practised sportsman; and on again swept the hounds and the youth, as though neither could tire; and on, too, swept the hunter, parallel to, but separated from them by a bank and pales so high, and a ditch so deep, as to daunt even that bold and fearless rider. A muttered oath at the unexpected nailing up of a gate, with other words of impatience, mingled with orders how to manage the hounds till he could ride round, showed the young man his dilemma.

"Stop, sir; it is hard if between us we cannot break down a raim of pales."

In an instant he was at the top of the bank; when, selecting a rail which bore the marks of age, he seized it with a sudden spring, hanging to it with all his weight, till it broke down with a crash, whilst he leapt lightly aside to avoid its falling upon him. A few moments more, and the hunter, on his practised and powerful steed, was out in the open country again, pursuing the hounds, and followed, at scarce the distance of a stone's throw, by the swift runner. Within ten minutes the fox was seized and torn—the hounds rejoicing in the victory, but certainly not more than the bold hunter, who had dismounted to secure the brush, which he presented to the young stranger, as he came up, with a warm eulogy on his activity, and a declaration that

He had well earned the trophy. The runner received the offered honour with a bow of acknowledgment, and then, breathless and panting, threw himself on the ground, with a passing thought of the real worthlessness of that for which he had so eagerly sought. The pursuit at an end—the desired object obtained—the satiety of possession succeeded. But he was too young and inexperienced, too ardent and active, for such a thought to linger long—and rising with recovered breath and strength, he looked ready for another chase, had such come in his way; but none such crossing his path, he prepared to regain the road from which he had been tempted.

"You must be tired," said the hunter, addressing the young stranger with friendly warmth, for his eagerness in the chase and swiftness of foot had won his favour.

"A little blown, sir, but not easily tired: I am inured to exercise."

"Right: I hate your lazy loons. You are swift of foot; even Staynought" (patting his gallant bay) "could scarcely distance you: for my part, I prefer riding."

"So do I, sir, when I have the choice," replied the young man, with a smile.

"We shall be good friends, I see. I feared at first you were one of the wandering gentlemen-beggars, who tease one to subscribe to prints or poetry. Parcel of nonsense! though I did give something to have Staynought's picture taken; but then he deserves it. You are not one of that sort—such fellows know little of hunting."

"No, indeed, sir; I have not the happiness to be a genius."

"Happiness! I see no happiness in it. A genius, to my mind, is another name for a beggar—next of kin to a fool: I never saw a rich genius yet, or one who could hunt. Give me the sight, and the cry of the hounds on a good scenting morning, and all the pictures and the poetry may be buried in the Red Sea with Pharaoh's host. I never will have a genius about my premises: he is sure to be the most idle and worthless of the whole set,—and I fear I have a pretty many knaves and idlers about me as it is; but, then, my father had before me, and the rogues have a regard for the family.—Here am I talking instead of riding home, and all the time as hungry as a bound. Come and dine with me:

I owe you a dinner, if only for breaking down the pales; and a good dinner I will ensure its being, with capital wine to wash it down. Come along! it is getting late. A fine laugh I shall have against Barrett and his set! I told them they were after a fresh fox; but they only laughed, and away they went. Rattler was brought up at the Grange, and I can always depend on him,"—caressing a fine hound, that, as if conscious of the praise bestowing on him, fawned and jumped on his praiser. "Good dog.—Rattler! down! down! —Come along, young man; this is the way to the Grange, and dinner must have been ready this hour. I am sorry I have not another horse to offer you; and I am not much of a walker myself," hesitating to remount, and looking embarrassed.

"Pray mount, sir, without heeding me,—I am not tired; but, as a stranger, I may be intruding."

"Intruding! pooh, nonsense! Philip Conyers never says what he does not mean, and would share his last meal with a keen hunter like yourself: besides, remember the pales, and make no excuses."

"I will make no more, sir, but accept your hospitable offer as frankly as it was made."

"That is right—I am no niggard to grudge a dinner. I keep up the old-fashioned hospitality, as my fathers did before me: I hate your French wines, and your French ways. What have we to do with the French, but to drub them when they get insolent? I am an Englishman; and one English hunter is worth all the French counts that ever were, or ever will be. I don't like any thing French; but give my friends a good fat sirloin, and fine old Port and Madeira. Phil Conyers would never ask any one to dinner whom he did not wish to see, and never stint a friend to a bottle."

"I have no doubt of your kindness and hospitality, sir," remarked his guest, repressing a smile at the squire's harangue, who had grown warm in his abuse of the French, whose wines, cookery, and manners, he most cordially detested, without having by any means a sufficient knowledge to fit him for the office of judge.

"There is the Grange!" exclaimed the squire, with honest pride, checking his horse as abruptly as his discourse, (a dissertation on drawing covers,) to point out the irregular

mansion to his stranger guest. "The Conyresses have held it these four hundred years, and more."

The young man's praise was sufficiently warm to content the squire, who again put his horse in motion, and would have recurred to the skill required in a huntsman, had not his guest inquired how many miles they were from the town of Wexton.

"Ten, at least, as the crow flies; more by the carriage-road."

"Indeed!—that is unlucky! Do you think, sir, I could hire a horse in the village? for, despite my boasting, I should not like to walk so many miles to-night."

"Were you going to Wexton, then, when you joined the chase? It has taken you many miles out of your way."

"I never considered that, and scarcely regret it after such a glorious run."

"You shall have no cause to regret it," replied the squire, delighted at the enthusiastic praise of the run, of which he considered himself the hero. "You shall sleep at the Grange to-night, and ride one of my horses to Wexton to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir; the offer is too delightful to be willingly declined; but, unluckily, my portmanteau is at Wexton."

"Never heed that: I can supply you."

The whole tribe of dogs came out, as usual, to leap on the squire, and bark at the stranger. By dint of using whip and voice, the former reached the hall-door without falling over any; and the latter, meeting their attacks with boldness, and their fawning with encouragement, at once established himself as a friend in their estimation,—a circumstance which caused the squire to look with increasing favour on his guest.

"I had better show you the way," said Mr. Conyers, stamping with his thick boots up the heavy oak staircase, and throwing open the door of a large dark panelled room with a force that would have annihilated a nervous invalid.

"Well, Mabel, how is your headach? Take to hunting, child, and you would not know the meaning of the

words ;—don't be shy; but come out of the corner, and welcome the guest I have brought you home."

The gentle Mabel, half blushing, half smiling at his address, for she had lost some of her timidity, came out from the recess of the window where she had been sitting at work, and courtised to the stranger, who—shame to his manners!—forgot to bow in return; so surprised was he at the sight of the lovely girl before him (having taken for granted that his host had no daughter,) and so annoyed as he glanced at his dirty boots, considering how ill suited was the state of his apparel for a lady's drawing-room.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but my dress!—I had no idea I was to be introduced to a lady!" stammered out the stranger, who had all the formal respect of that period for the female sex; and was, for the first time in his life, presented to a young and lovely girl of his own station in society.

"Never mind your dress!" replied the squire, little caring for such things himself; "depend upon it, she will not look enough to know you a week hence, and will not heed how you are dressed."

"Not in the least," replied Mabel, with an unflattering simplicity which her hearer would have dispensed with.

"Besides, you shall have the choice of my wardrobe—embroidered waistcoats, velvet coats, sword, bag and wig."

"I fear your kind offer will little advantage me," replied his guest with recovered ease and gaiety, glancing with an arch smile at the tall and portly squire, nearly double his size.

Mr. Conyers laughed a long, loud laugh at the idea of the slight figure of his guest in his full-sized apparel; and even Mabel smiled at the thought, won to look at the stranger by the archness and sweetness of his tones, so different from the rough, unmodulated voices that usually met her ear.

"Then I do not know what is to be done," said the squire, still laughing. "The best I can offer is, that James shall rub you down to the most advantage, and put fresh powder in your hair, whilst we will engage not to be critical;—but make haste, for dinner waits."

"Oh, come: you do very well," said the kind-hearted

host, as the stranger re-entered the drawing-room but a few moments after himself.

"Thank you for the verdict in my favour," replied the young man with his wonted and winning smile.

"I could not have said otherwise," remarked the squire, bluntly, really gazing with admiration on the graceful figure, bright hazel eye, dark brown curling hair, and animated features of his guest.—"By the way, Mabel has reminded me of a sad omission; I never introduced you, seeming to take to you as if we had met before. But it is rather awkward not to be able to tell your name."

"Edward Elton, sir."

"And this is Mabel Conyers—my only daughter—the most timid of the timid. I shall marvel if she look at you enough to know if you are old or young—simpleton as she is!"

"You told me, the other day, that I was growing quite bold," said his blushing child.

"Did I?—then I fear I said what was not quite the truth; and it is not often Philip Conyers can be accused of that.—But there is dinner; so march you down, Mabel, and I will put off chiding till another time."

And down marched Mabel, the gentlemen following,—handing the ladies not being the fashion of those times in a retired country neighbourhood. The dinner (delayed for the squire) was concluded, having been done ample justice to by the hunters; and still Mabel sat at the head of the table, doing its honours, though the conversation turned much on hunting, and she, as a gentle, generous woman, bestowed her sympathy upon the hunted, notwithstanding her father's remembrance that she had but lately lost some favourite chicken through Reynard's voracity, and that he had seen even her cheek flush and her eye kindle when the train of hounds and hunters swept on before her.

"All looked so eager and so happy, I forgot for the moment what the poor fox must suffer."

"Poor fox!—why, my little Mabel, you are too kind-hearted by half!—who would think of pitying a fox? If we did not hunt him, he would die in tortures in a trap, or pine away in old age. Besides, he likes it. I am sure he does!" he reiterated more loudly, as he marked the half smile on the lips of his guest and daughter.

"I never heard one say he did not," remarked Edward, gaily, turning the conversation, which he fancied might weary his fair hostess, who still lingered on, unconscious of a longer stay than usual, so well had the young stranger's animated remarks beguiled the time. But clocks were not then stayed from striking, lest the flight of time thus frequently brought before the mind should dull the thoughtless; and Mabel started when she found, from the warning tone of the old horologe, how long she had lingered in the dining-room.

"Fill your glass!" said the squire to his guest, pressing more wine upon him with the hospitality of those olden times.

"Excuse me, sir," said the young man with courteous firmness. "I have mixed but little with the world, and have neither the will nor the power to drink deep."

"You shall have your way. If my friends like to be carried to bed, instead of walking, I am not the man to balk them; but I am no drinker when by myself. Suppose we go to the stable, then; I want to see how Staynought is after his chase, and if the hounds have had their dinner, and been sent to Barrett's, as I ordered. After that, Mabel shall give us tea."

Mabel did give them tea, and presided at the supper-table; and so frank and animated was the stranger's manner, yet withal so attentive and respectful to father and daughter, that his being unknown till that evening was forgotten. The very dogs fawned upon him as on an old acquaintance. The squire declared him to be a fine young fellow; and the timid Mabel would have recognised him had she not seen him again for months.

And what thought Edward Elton of his new acquaintance? We have seen that he was inclined to look on all things through a rose-coloured medium:—no wonder then that the warmth of the squire had won his heart; whilst the gentle Mabel, with her soft and touching loveliness, seemed to him as one of the fairy forms of which he had occasionally dreamt when resting on the greensward in some sheltered glade,—a brighter being than had ever yet crossed his path.

Female forms flitted before him in his slumbers. Aunt Judith came, with her harsh tones and her keen look, waving

her arm towards him with a Fury's wrath; but one with a gliding, graceful motion came between, and the arm dropped weak and harmless! The figure was closely muffled, as hers who had fainted: he knelt before it, praying to see her face! The hood was raised, and disclosed the dazzling beauty of the portrait at Beauchamp Park, and he thought the eyes were turned on him in love. Even while he looked, her more than earthly beauty faded to the hues of death—the cloak became a shroud—and the dweller of the dark grave stood before him! She passed from his sight as a wreath of mist, and Mabel stood in her place, with a gentle and confiding look, and a quiet, dove-like beauty, preferable, in his eyes, to the brightness of the former vision! He held her hand in his—he whispered low soft words, and listened for her answer;—before it came, his father rushed between and parted them! Then succeeded a strange confusion; many figures passed—some looking on him kindly, some in wrath;—but he could distinguish no features, till Robert Forman, the young man whom he had defended, and the highwayman from whom he had defended him, stood before him.

So Slumber wove her mingled web, till, roused by inharmonious voices beneath his window, he started up in his bed—gazed around in wonder—rubbed his eyes, to be sure that he no longer slept—and, after some moments of consideration, comprehended where he was, and how he had come thither!

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILST dressing, the dream of the night before recurred to his mind; but, not able to unravel its tangled web, he resolved to dismiss it from his mind, and descended to the breakfast-room, the dining apartment of the preceding day. The fatigue and excitement of the chase had produced a slight degree of fever, and sleep had brought before him, as in a mental phantasmagoria, the scenes and the persons he had encountered during his short life; but the machinery being out of order, there had been a sad want of harmony in distances, and lights, and shadows,—a crowding and mingling of all together, creating an inextricable confusion. That Aunt Judith, and the fainting lady, and the portrait, should have been prominent figures in the visioned confusion, was not strange, for there was mystery attaching to each; but why the gentle and single-minded Mabel should have formed part and parcel of the vision, or appeared in connexion with those singular personages, was not so easily to be accounted for, till, on his entering the breakfast-room, where she was ministering at the tea-table, he was struck with a real or fancied likeness to the admired portrait. So slight, however, was the resemblance (being only an occasional look, not a general similarity) that he sometimes doubted its reality, holding it but a fancy engendered by his dream, and not worthy of farther thought. The portrait was beautiful and brilliant, with something of a lofty air; Mabel, soft and lovely,—looking up, when she ventured to look, with a touching sweetness that asked for pity, and won regard.

"Plague take that colt!" exclaimed the squire, starting

up from the breakfast-table towards the conclusion of the repast, and approaching the window. "He will never be properly broken, fit for hunting, he is so hot and restiff."

"It is a fine animal!" remarked Edward, having followed his host.

"Yes. I gave fifty guineas for him a year ago; but Dawkins cannot break him, though famous for taming the wildest. I believe I must let him have him to send down into the West to his brother; for his name is up here, and no one will mount him. Thirty guineas is little; but I could not recommend him. No one but Dawkins dares ride him; and he has been thrown twice, and cannot manage him."

"I do not think his present rider goes the right way to work," observed his guest.

"Indeed! Dawkins is noted as the best breaker-in for miles round," remarked the squire rather peevishly. "Perhaps you have horses of your own, and superior jockeys?"

"I have no horse, sir. I am sorry to say, a gallant steed is still to me an object of desire, instead of possession."

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Conyers, compassionately, forgetting to feel offended at the presumption of one who had no stud giving an opinion, in his pity at his being horseless; the which, as an inveterate hunter, unwilling, and, from disuse, unable to walk, he considered one of the mighty misfortunes of this life.

"He will be thrown!" exclaimed Mabel in alarm, as the horse reared, kicked, and curveted in no gentle manner.

"Be under no alarm, Miss Conyers! I am much mistaken if that rider will provoke his horse to more than he can well endure."

The squire turned a quick and not well-pleased glance at the speaker, remarking pettishly, "Suppose you try him yourself, young man."

"Readily, sir! with your permission," replied his guest, meeting his gaze with a steady look, his cheek flushing at the tone still more than the words.

"Do not try! Pray do not try!" pleaded Mabel earnestly, forgetting her shyness in her fear of an accident.

"I thank you for your kindness, Miss Conyers," he replied, gently; then added a little proudly, for his young blood was up, "I must prove to your father that I am not the boaster he believes me."

"Surely you will not let him go!" exclaimed Mabel, clinging to her father's arm. "Think if he should be hurt!"

"Pshaw! Mabel, you are always frightened about every thing: I dare say he will think better of it."

Edward Elton had lingered a moment to catch those gentle tones, but he lingered not with the hope of being recalled, and though his eye flashed at the squire's answer, it made no change in his resolution.

Choosing a whip as he passed through the hall, he stepped out upon the lawn and walked towards the still restiff animal.

"Stop, Mr. Elton," exclaimed the squire, throwing up the window, and half shaking off his daughter, who was still clinging to his arm.

Edward approached, but with a rather stately air, uncertain if the Mr. Elton so formally pronounced was meant in mockery or politeness; for, brief as had been their acquaintance, the squire, considering his age a warrant, had before waved punctilio in his address.

"What is your wish, sir?" inquired Edward, proudly.

Mr. Conyers paused for a moment.

"Wish?—oh, to have the past five minutes forgotten," he answered frankly, having recovered his good-humour, and not liking to expose the young man to danger. "It would be a strange piece of hospitality to condemn my guest to ride a restiff horse, with plenty of others in the stable."

"In plain words, sir, you had rather that I would not mount your colt."

"In plain words, yes."

"One more question, if you please, sir; and pardon me if I request a candid answer. Do you fear for your horse, or your guest?"

"Since you will have a candid answer—for my guest. The horse is of little value now, and would be worth something if broken of his tricks. Come back! Mabel will lose her wits with fright if you mount."

"I am much honoured by Miss Conyers's humane anxiety; but she must feel, after what has passed, that it is necessary I should prove I made no boast of what I dared not at least attempt.—I have no doubt as to the result."

"Then you have ridden, though you have no horses of your own?" inquired the squire, who was vexed at his own petulance, and could not but admire the respectful firmness of the young man.

"Constantly, sir. I have frequently assisted a famous breaker (a singular character living near us) in taming the wildest colts; besides having practised in a wandering circus to whose owner I had rendered some little service."

"Why did you not say so before?" asked Mr. Conyers, bluntly.

"You gave me no opportunity, sir, and might have thought it boasting."

"Ay, ay, hot young blood takes offence at trifles: I was young myself, once. I am sorry for what I said; and now, come in: or mount, an' you will," seeing that the young man's heart was set upon it.

"Thank you, sir," replied Edward, with his usual open expression of countenance. "May I choose a bridle as well as a whip?"

"Any thing you please. Old Ned will show you where they are kept."

In a few minutes Edward returned, followed by the gray-headed groom, bearing the chosen bridle.

"You had better put it on yourself, sir, if you understands them things; but if you bean't used to vicious horses, don't ye mount; Fury has larnt a thing or two."

"Thank you, I understand; but I am used to all sorts of horses;" and his smile won the old man's heart, who, truth to tell, had been thrown by Fury, (as the horse had been named by general acclamation,) and entertained some jealousy of Dawkins.

"Indeed, sir, you had better not try: I can scarcely sit un; and as to managing un, it's next to nothing!" said Dawkins with considerable earnestness, as Edward prepared to put on the bridle with the assistance of Ned.

"I know the worth of your advice, but am not frightened. There are several ways of conquering the vicious."

"If you choose to try, sir—" muttered Dawkins, shrinking back from the keen gaze of the speaker, and offering no farther opposition.

The animal submitted to his new equipment with a quietude which he rarely accorded to a stranger, and re-

ceived his patting with tolerable graciousness; but Edward was not rendered less wary by this courteous conduct. As he was ready to mount, a servant brought him out a hunting cap.

" You had better put it on," said the squire, kindly.

" Thank you, sir: I had quite forgotten my head was uncovered." Then, seeing Mabel still by her father's side, half looking, and half turned away, he added, " I assure you, Miss Conyers, there is not the slightest danger to be anticipated; but as the animal will not be subdued without a struggle, had you not better retire? By Fury's eye, I see that his present courtesy will not last long."

" You are sure there is no danger?"

" None, I feel convinced; but you will imagine some."

" Do try and be a heroine for once, Mabel, and look without blenching on a prancing steed, as they say in the Seven Champions," observed her father.

Mabel shook her head, but she did not quit the window; and her anxiety became too intense to allow her to withdraw her gaze, though the clasped hands and pallid cheeks gave little promise of her ever becoming a heroine. The young man, gathering up the reins, placed his hand on the animal's shoulder and sprang into his seat before any present were aware of the attempt. No sooner did the horse feel his weight, than he reared so high, that the crowd (for the whole household had assembled) feared he would fall backwards. A murmur of apprehension rose, which grew in strength as the animal increased his violence; sometimes leaping off the ground with fierce and fiery bounds; then standing on his hind legs, and pawing with his fore feet, or plunging and kicking, till the general opinion among the domestics that he was possessed by the Evil One, and more than mortal horse, scarcely seemed an idle jest. Even the florid cheek of the bold squire lost some of its strong colouring, and Mabel's grew paler still, though she uttered neither scream nor question; but the rider kept a firm and fearless seat. His temper was unruffled—his whip unused; and, for a time, he rather bore with the creature's rage than opposed it, merely keeping a steady hold on the rein, bending, or sitting erect, as best enabled him to defeat the endeavours to throw him: but when he had sufficiently proved to the horse himself, which began to weary with his exertions,

the vanity of such a hope, his knees pressed him closer and closer, till the animal trembled beneath the pressure; whilst the flashing eye grew dull—the neck less proudly arched—and he stood quiet as a lamb, with quivering nostrils and a smoking coat. A shout of admiration rose from the crowd, above which was heard the squire's loud *view-hollo*, followed by an almost equally loud “Bravely done!”

The rider, slightly relaxing his pressure, was patting the animal's neck, and, as some assert, looking towards a fair pale face, when the horse, startled by the *hollo*, bounded away at full speed. For an instant the rider wavered in his seat at this unexpected change;—the next showed him as firmly fixed—as much master as before. Not that he slackened the animal's speed, but, on the contrary, urged him up a sharp hill, till he would gladly have paused for breathing-time, an indulgence denied, till checked and tamed, at least for a time, the young man brought the horse back to its owner in a mood so gentle, that he shrank not at noise or caressing, and exhibited no farther symptom of rebellion.

“Bravely done indeed!” exclaimed the squire, coming out on the lawn, and shaking Edward's hand with an almost painful warmth,—“Bravely done indeed! and you scarcely used the whip.”

“No, sir. I believe there would be little call for force on most occasions, would we subdue our own tempers first: firmness will ever effect more than passion.”

“Very likely: only some cannot help being a little warm on occasion—it is their nature,—but then it is over in a minute,” replied the squire with a slight self-consciousness. “I was wrong to doubt your powers.”

“Never think of that, sir: I believe I spoke more freely than I should have done. Your whole conduct had been so kind, that I forgot we had met but yesterday, and were not old friends.”

“Old friends!—and so we are—or will be. You shall not go to-day, as you proposed, but stay at the Grange as long as you can find it agreeable; and I will mount you till the end of the season. It would be a shame such a rider should be obliged to walk—leave that to book-worms and milksops; you will do credit to my hunters, and bring my stud into still greater repute. No refusal,—or I shall be

affronted, and think you have not forgiven my doubts.—Jack!" turning to one of the numerous doers of nothing, "go to Wexton for this gentleman's portmanteau: he will give you directions."

"But, my dear sir—" began Edward.

"No 'dear sir' to me, if you refuse my invitation," replied the warm-hearted, but sometimes fiery squire. "If you don't like the Grange and its master, go!—if you do, stay!"

"Then I shall stay, most certainly," replied the young man with an animation that proved how much his own wishes were gratified by the decision. "I only meant to say, that as yet you know nothing of me or my father."

"Hang your father! I don't care whether you had one or not," exclaimed the squire pettishly. "Such a runner and rider, with such eagerness in hunting, can neither be rogue nor coward. I would back you as a gentleman for a thousand; and what care I where you live, or where you were born? or whether you had a title in your family, or not? Say no more! but stay here quietly till tired of us."

"I might chance to become a fixture, then, sir."

"With all my heart; Mabel and I find it dull sometimes; for she takes no interest in hunting, and I can't read and work. I owe you much for taming Fury;—but do you think this gentleness will last?"

"With care, sir, I hope it may. I judge him to have a high, but not vicious spirit, that kindness and firmness will subdue. I should recommend no one's mounting him for some days but myself, and his being groomed by a person who has not groomed him before, that he may forget his old tricks and win himself a new character;—it would be better even if his former attendant did not go near him. I have little doubt that he will prove worth many thirty guineas."

"Then suppose we give the charge of him to old Ned," remarked the squire.

"Just as you please, sir; I am sure I don't want the care of un," replied Dawkins, sullenly; muttering, "The young gentleman may find himself mistaken;" but turning away, as he spoke, from that young gentleman's look.

"I understand what I am saying," remarked Edward,

calmly; "keep you away from him, and I do not fear a relapse."

"Mind that, Dawkins! I will not have you interfere," observed Mr. Conyers in a peremptory tone that ensured obedience.

The man turned away without reply; but there was wrath in his heart against Edward from that day.

"I do not know what you will think of my forwardness, Miss Conyers, but I have accepted your father's kind invitation to remain some days at the Grange," said Edward, after expressing his hopes that she had not been much alarmed.

"I am glad of it, for I fear my father finds me but a dull companion," she replied frankly and simply.

"Mending, Mabel! mending, I hope!" observed her father. "You did not squall as some silly women would have done, though even I feared for the rider. To be sure, you looked like a corpse; but if women will only hold their tongues, we must let them turn pale; and you had the sense to think of the cap."

"Then I owe that kindness to Miss Conyers?"

"That you do! and you look so grateful, I wish you would repay it by persuading her to mount the mare I bought for her especial use. That would be doing her a real service!"

Mabel by no means considered the service so essential, but, to her father's delight, she really did mount it, though with many misgivings; but, either thanks to young Elton's carefulness, who kept close by her side—or that the animal was, as the squire asserted, the most gentle of the gentle, she acquitted herself so well, that her father, as he kissed her cheek on lifting her from the saddle, pronounced her "a good girl," predicting that she would in time become an accomplished horsewoman, if Elton would but take her in hand. Her only reply was a smile, and playfully expressed doubt that that would prove beyond even Mr. Elton's powers. Strange to say, she did not blush at his reply, or turn away from his animated smile; so completely had his frank and graceful manner won her confidence.

The evening seemed but short to all. The subduing Fury had firmly established Edward in the good opinion of his host, who, in his enthusiastic admiration of his horse-

manship, would have vouched for his possessing every possible virtue; and each would have been a little annoyed had any kind, officious friend thought it a duty to point out the shortness of their acquaintance.

What then? Likings and dislikings have clocks of their own, which keep time by other than the common-place rules that content the herd of mankind. They are ruled by the dials of the heart—the shine or the shadow of the sun of affection. Yet, truth to say, the sun of affection is a capricious sun; it will lengthen a day to a year, make a year seem but as one fleeting day; and I would not advise a gourmand to regulate his meals by such a dial;—he could not read the riddle of its marks.

The squire at least could not be termed romantic; and, with all due deference to the young gentleman's vanity, he was a greater favourite with the father than the daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

"We must ride hard, or we shall be late," said Mr. Conyers the next morning to his young guest, whom he had mounted on one of his hacks, having sent a favourite hunter on to cover for his use.

"A fine scenting-day! We shall have a capital run; feel no delicacy, but maintain the character of Dasher," he said, as he was, some time after, exchanging the hack for the hunter, and looking to the tightening of the girths. "I feel like a boy at his first field this morning. Let the youngsters look to their laurels, for I intend to be in at the death again! There are ten years of life in the winding of that horn and the carolling of those hounds."

It is not for man to look into futurity; well for him that it is not! But he should not hold all as certain, of which his bounded vision cannot behold the uncertainty. Who shall say what a day may bring forth? Not long past the prime of life, the squire counted upon length of days;—in the pride of his strength, he thought to lead the chase;—he never led the chase again!

The hunters had met at the appointed place;—the weather and the scent—the relative value of various horses and hounds—the last run, and the last piece of scandal—the flirtations, births, deaths, and marriages of the whole county, (for there is no gossip like that of hunters on a hunting morning;) all these, and a thousand other matters, had been discussed;—the squire had boasted of his triumph

two days before, and laughed at the majority, who, by not following him, had lost a capital run, and gained nothing but vexation;—Sir Thomas Barrett (the most heavy of heavy baronets, and master of the hounds) had asked after Miss Conyers's health with praiseworthy soberness of tone;—the brake had been drawn—the fox had broken cover—the proper number of view-hollos had been given—the hounds were close on the scent—and on swept the chase in gallant show; the early morning air (for hunters were no lie-a-beds in those days) loaded with the fragrance of the bright gorse, on whose prickly boughs hung the dew-beaded gossamer, glistening in the March sun as a silver net-work strung with diamonds.

The gentle and odorous breeze was refreshing, and on swept the hunt, as we have said, in gallant show, passing over many a mile, leaving many a straggler far behind (for the first burst had breathed unpractised steeds)—yet still on swept the chase over bank, and wild, and field; and of the few whose horses had not tired, Philip Conyers and Edward Elton were the foremost. The light weight of the latter would have enabled him to outstrip his host; but a feeling of courtesy checked his speed, and he rode side by side with the honest squire. Had a painter desired models for a hunting-piece, here they were!—bold riders, and eager sportsmen—their handsome features animated with the spirit of pursuit.

"I said I should lead the chase for many a day yet!" shouted the squire to his brother hunters just behind.

A rough broken hedge on a steep bank, with a deep ditch on the other side, was before them.

"Over!" shouted the squire to Elton. "Have no care for Dasher! he could clear twice as much; and I know you can keep your seat."

The order was obeyed, as soon as given; the young man having only hesitated because he was riding another's horse, for the fine animal, accustomed to such a much greater weight, was scarcely blown, and steed and rider stood in safety on the other side, Edward having taken the precaution to select a low part of the hedge, and, uncertain of the extent of leap, to make allowance for any probable distance.

"Take care, sir,—the ditch is very broad and deep," said

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Edward, pausing a moment to look back at the squire, whose horse was by no means as fresh as his own.

"The squire craning!" shouted a voice from behind.

"Dareall blown!" exclaimed another, as the gallant horse made a slight stumble.

"Philip Conyers balked!" cried a third, coming rapidly up.

"Let me lead him over and change horses; mine still is fresh," said Edward.

"Nonsense, boy!—stand aside!—Philip Conyers was never balked yet!" he shouted, looking back at the advancing taunters for an instant, ere, striking his spurs into his panting horse, he forced him to leap.

The noble animal stumbled again;—still his master urged him on. He rose to the rein, exerting all his remaining strength; but his fore feet struck the top of the hedge, which crashed at his touch, and down came horse and rider into the deep ditch below, the whole weight of the powerful animal resting on the right arm and shoulder of the squire.

"Stained the scarlet!" shouted one of the foremost hunters, clearing the leap at a less perilous spot.

"Who leads the field now?" shouted another equally fortunate.

"Hope you are not hurt," said Sir Thomas Barrett, riding on without waiting for a reply.

"I said his horse was blown," remarked another; while some passed on without a knowledge of the accident.

"For Heaven's sake, assist me to raise the horse, or Mr. Conyers will be crushed!" exclaimed Edward, appealing to the last of the party, a sober-looking person, who had led his horse over bank and ditch, and was remounting.

"I will send the first man I meet," he replied deliberately, riding on as he spoke.

There lay the kind-hearted squire, who never refused a favour, if in his power to grant it, lying in a ditch—the horse which he had urged to the leap to appease his pride, knowing him to be distressed, resting on him—tended only by a stranger, whilst the friends of years passed on unheeding.

"Never mind me! Let Dasher head the hunt, since Dareall cannot," exclaimed Mr. Conyers, as Edward, who

had dismounted on perceiving the accident, came to his assistance.

"Pardon me, sir: I cannot leave you thus."

"Why not? My friends have passed on; and you are but a stranger," said the squire with a slight tinge of bitterness.

"I would not quit you, sir, were you really a stranger; much less one from whom I have received such kindness. I hope you are not hurt."

"I hope not; but I cannot stir, with Dareall on me."

"Do not attempt it, lest he should struggle. I will try to remove him gently;—happily he has not yet stirred."

He said truly—he had not yet stirred,—he never stirred again. The heart of the gallant horse had broken in the endeavour to redeem his master's fame—to gratify his master's pride.

"Is Dareall hurt?" inquired Mr. Conyers: "he does not try to rise."

"I see a labourer in the field yonder, and will call him to assist in raising the poor animal."

"You do not say if he is hurt," remarked the squire, looking anxiously up into the young man's face.

"He is in no pain, sir—never will be again."

"Dead?"

"I fear so. Yet it is a providential thing; for had he struggled, lying beneath him as you do, your life would have been in danger."

"Dead!" murmured the squire. "Poor Dareall dead!—All my doing!—I should have spared him." And the kind squire closed his eyes with a groan, which his own sufferings had not extorted.

By the aid of the labourer, Mr. Conyers was extricated from the weight of the dead horse, but, faint and giddy, could not stand. A late straggler rode for medical assistance and a carriage, at the request of Edward, who thought of every thing best for the occasion; and returned in a much shorter time than could have been hoped, having met the surgeon returning in a chaise from a distant and urgent call. After assisting to place the squire in the chaise, Edward remounted his horse to precede the sufferer and get all ready against his arrival at the Grange.

"Break it gently to Mabel," said Mr. Conyers in a low

tone ; "she is so gentle—so affectionate :—say she must bear up to nurse me. And poor Dareall!—tell Ned to send for him, and see that not a hair of his skin is touched ; —he died to save my honour, and shall have honourable burial!"

"All shall be done as you would wish," replied the young man.

"Thank you!" and the bold, strong squire again sank fainting into the corner.

"I hope you have had a capital run :—is not that what I am to say?" asked Mabel Conyers, of Edward Elton, as he took his seat beside her in silence.

"Not very capital?"

She looked up at his tone, her fears taking the alarm on the instant.

"Is my kind father come home?"

"He will be here shortly."

"You look very, very pale! Have you been thrown?"

"No."

"Are you ill?" she inquired anxiously, ever ready to sympathize with suffering.

"Not in body ;—but pray do not alarm yourself!"

"Something dreadful has happened, Mr. Elton, or you would not look upon me so pityingly, and then turn away! Do not deceive me! Tell me—tell me all! I am not so weak as some think!"

"I will tell you all, Miss Conyers; but you must strive for firmness—you must not let your love imagine danger where there is none!"

"My father!"—it is of him you would tell me ; yet you said he would come shortly—did you not?" looking wildly into his face.

"I expect him every moment, to tell you with his own lips that you have no cause for fear. I speak but the truth,"—(seeing her doubtful)—"on my word, I would not deceive you: there has been an accident, and your kind father may require some of your gentle nursing ; but I have Mr. Horton's assurance there is no danger!"

"I do not think you would deceive me," she said, looking less wildly.

"You do me but justice. Your father had me break it gently to his Mabel, and tell her that she must bear up to

be his nurse. Do not check your tears for my presence; but rather look upon me for a time as a kind brother, grieving as you grieve. I would rather see tears than that look of wild alarm!"

"Tell me all, then!"

He did tell her all, so gently and so kindly, that she feared no longer, though she sorrowed still. Her tears flowed freely; and, for a time, she did not seek to check them, weeping on as though he had been really the brother that he had begged her to consider him, till, soothed by his kindness, she joined with him in making the necessary arrangements for the comfort of the sufferer.

"You shall see how calm I can be,—looking my hopes rather than my fears! Coward in general, I will play the heroine now, not to add pain to pain!"

"I will not doubt you," he replied, as she tried to smile through her tears.

But he did doubt her firmness, when she should first see her father. It is so fearful, even to the firmest, to see a large, strong man with the hue of death upon his cheek—his powers gone—his strength departed! If such the feelings of a stranger—what those of a child? He would have spared her the sight till his injuries had been examined and the surgeon's duties over; but the father asked for his child, and the child would not be withheld.

"Now be calm, for your father's sake, still more than your own," said Edward, gently, as he supported her into the hall, where the squire was resting in an arm-chair till he should have recovered sufficient strength to reach his room.

Stifling a groan, he spoke in a cheerful voice as his child entered the hall.

"Don't be frightened, Mabel!—there are years of life in me yet, and I shall be hunting again before the end of the season. You had better not touch me," he added, as she would have thrown her arms round his neck. "Be a good child, and don't cry; for I shall want you to nurse me, and I cannot bear tears. Give me one kiss, and then go; for Horton, I see, is impatient to make me worse, and afterwards boast a cure."

Her lips clung to his, as though the pressure ensured his safety; but, at a sign from her father, Edward drew her gen-

tly away, and led her back to the sitting-room:—then, and not till then, did her sobs break forth.

“ You promised to tell me the truth,” she said, advancing eagerly to meet him as he returned to her more than an hour afterwards.

“ I did; and you promised to be calm, for your father’s sake.”

The report was distressing to those interested in the sufferer. His collar-bone was broken, and his shoulder slightly injured; besides various bruises, and a wound in the leg, which would prevent his using it for some time to come. None of the injuries were dangerous in themselves; but the squire’s full habit—the life he had led for many years, his time having been principally passed between hard drinking and hard exercise—and his avowed determination not to submit patiently to the necessary regimen, excited reasonable fears of fever and inflammation.

“ Now that I have spoken of your father, I must speak a little of myself. As an acquaintance—may I say a friend?—of so short a standing, perhaps my remaining may appear an intrusion; yet it seems unfeeling to leave you at this moment, and Mr. Conyers has strongly urged my stay. Will you decide for me?”

“ Oh, do stay!—do not go now!—you think of every thing; and you may persuade my father to attend to Mr. Horton’s orders—he is so fond of you:—yet it is selfish to ask you to remain.”

“ It is my own wish, and I only wanted your sanction to what I so much desired.”

And he did stay—day after day, week after week—till that stay was considered a matter of course, whilst a departure would have been looked on as a strange proceeding. The confinement of a sick-room, to one of the squire’s habits, who appeared, like the Indians on the first discovery of the New World, to consider that man and horse were inseparable, was a hard trial; the more hard from happening in the beginning of March, instead of the end.

“ If it had been the last day of the season, I should not so much have minded; but the scent has lain so well ever since my fall.”

Thus murmured the squire in his impatient moods: but

those moods were, considering his character and pursuits, less frequent than might have been expected, and his recovery more rapid than his child had dared to hope. Yet he sometimes raged at his doctor, declaring he wanted to exhibit him as a skeleton—sometimes at the indifference and carelessness of his brother hunters, who after the first few days called but rarely, finding that Mr. Horton was peremptory in his orders of non-admittance:—but never did he rage at his kind and gentle nurses. His child and his guest were ever with him, together or apart; soothing his sufferings, or administering to his wants, till he of himself remarked that the cheeks of both were pale, and, much as he valued their presence, insisted that they should ride or walk every day. This injunction was enforced by the skilful surgeon, and, after a little remonstrance, submitted to by both,—the more readily when the squire, mending daily, obtained permission to admit old Ned, the gray-headed groom, who gave full reports of the state of stable and kennel, occasionally smuggling in an inhabitant of the latter, regretting that he could not do the like by one of the former; besides, rendering all the histories of each day's hunt, generally riding over to Sir Thomas Barrett's in the morning for the purpose, as well as repeating all the kind things which the villagers and others said of the squire. In short, he was found a valuable auxiliary in the task of amusing the invalid, and became a great favourite with Master Elton and Miss Mabel, as he termed them; and, as is usual, the regard was mutual.

To do justice to the squire's hunting friends, we must state that his accident was universally regretted, even by those who were too eager in the chase to stay and assist him; and many would have visited him on the blank days, but for the surgeon's prohibition, and the distance—Sir Thomas Barrett's, ten miles off, being almost the nearest residence. Then, when April came, and the season was over, and the dull time of the year began, some were forced to town by the entreaties of wives and daughters—some by parliamentary duties;—some started for the round of races—and some, having turned their horses out to grass, found no means of riding over to see a man forbidden to play the hospitable host. Another source of vexation to the squire was, his hunters being idle; but this he partly remedied by in-

sisting on Elton's riding them for the last few days of the season.

"Ride them, as I would ride them," he said, "and don't think of Dareall. Poor Dareall! thank you for seeing him buried decently."

This, and once to old Ned, were the only times he ever mentioned his lost favourite; a proof to those who knew him how much he was regretted.

To Edward Elton, ever eager for action, the chase was delightful; it was to him a mental excitement, not a mere bodily exertion, for to him it imaged the race of life; but he would have declined the offer, had not the squire staked his favour on the acceptance, speaking sharply to Mabel, for the first time since his accident, on her turning pale at the mention, and pleading his fancied danger and her fears. Edward promised the terrified girl to be careful; and when she saw him return unharmed, and marked her father's pleasure whilst listening to his animated description of a famous burst, she half blushed at her fright, and consented as a penance to ride with him, as her father wished, only stipulating that he and the attendant groom should be mounted on very quiet horses.

When the squire was well enough to sit in an easy chair at the window, and look on the horses and dogs led forth beneath for his especial gratification, and listen to the village gossips with the bailiff at their head, who on various pretences found their way into his presence, he insisted that his daughter's rides should be prolonged, forgetting, in his sportsman-like anxiety that she should become a capital horsewoman, the probable consequences of such constant and encouraged intercourse between two young persons, neither frights, fools, nor cynics. His own partiality for his young guest increased every day; and he never considered whether his daughter's might not do the same. He never asked him of his family or fortune. What did either matter to him?—he was not going to marry him. But he was so fond of his society—in short, it became so completely a habit,—and with him habit was almost despotic,—that he considered a mention of departure as little short of an affront.

Edward Elton, on his part, sunning himself in the smiles of father and daughter, forgot his pining after action—his

desire to win an independence, and quietly lingered on at the Grange, instead of proceeding to town ; and this so naturally, that the only consciousness he showed of this being a change from his original plan, was an embarrassing debate, whether, having engaged to write to his father on his arrival in London, which should have been long since, he ought to act up to the letter, or the spirit of his engagement ; —a debate continued so long, and adjourned so often, that the letter was not written till after the squire had pronounced himself a perfect cure. It certainly required some skill and practice in diplomatic correspondence to explain why he, who had sighed and pined for action, now lingered contentedly in inactivity ; a task the more difficult since the writer could not, or would not, account for this sudden indolence.

Mr. Conyers had insisted on his acceptance of Fury ; and the young man had been compelled to consent, rather than offend the generous donor : but neither had considered how the means of its subsistence were to be provided. What did it matter ! The stable, the hay-stack, and the corn-bin were open to him as long as his master should remain at the Grange—and was not he a fixture ? Did not honest old Ned tend him with the greatest care, and declare, “that Master Elton deserved un, for making un so gentle, and Miss Mabel like—without using the whip too ?”

Miss Mabel felt no peculiar gratification in hearing Fury likened to her, as she always watched the pricking up of his ears, and the flashing of his eye, with the laudable desire of penetrating his intentions : but her father was exceedingly entertained by the comparison, and even Edward smiled,—so she smiled too ; and after she had, by great persuasion, allowed his master to ride him, whilst escorting her, and had found him quiet and tractable, she ceased to speak in his disfavour, and even occasionally patted him—when Edward stood beside her.

CHAPTER X.

"I NEVER saw a handsomer couple, or better riders," exclaimed the delighted squire, as Mabel and Edward rode beneath his window, greeting him with playful bows as they passed. "Take a long ride! I shall not walk till after dinner."

"Miss Conyers fears it may rain late in the day, and wishes to return early for your walk," replied Edward, checking his horse.

"Pshaw! rain?—no such thing!" looking up at the sky. "The little gipsy is afraid of her head-gear; the hat and feathers would not like a wetting. Never heed, Mabel; you ride so well, only now and then looking frightened, that I must present you with new woman's furniture. She really does you credit, Edward:—I believe now that you may teach her any thing." Then beckoning him to come nearer, he added in a lower tone, "Don't let her get wet; her poor mother died of consumption, some say; and Horton thinks her delicate."

"Do not fear, sir; I would guard her with my life. But if you think rain likely, we had better not go far,—habitations not being as plentiful as corn-fields hereabouts."

"It will not rain these four hours: so be off!"

"You have brought me a new road, and I do not know where I am, or in what direction lies the Grange," remarked Edward, looking up, and round, instead of into the face of his companion, which had been his occupation for some time past.

"Lost! quite lost!—so you must submit to my guidance, for once, instead of my always submitting to yours. We are going to enter Astell Park, and you must look round and admire, as all do, and have done for centuries."

"And the Grange, where is that?" he inquired, looking up, rather than round.

"The Grange!—oh, that is a good seven miles off! Are you weary of your horse, or your companion, that you look so troubled at my answer?"

"Fury is in high favour still;—and need I plead to the last charge?"

"Oh no! certainly not, since you do not wish it," she said a little hurriedly, stooping to adjust her habit.

"Then you acquit me of wearying, or being weary?"

"Old Ned says you are always asking odd questions about every thing," she replied, without raising her head.

"Old Ned says a great many strange things; remember, he compared you to Fury; but I must ask another question, in despite of him. Are we pursuing the nearest road to the Grange?"

"I believe so."

"Then what think you of a canter on this rare piece of level road?"

"Certainly!" striking her horse with the whip.

A few minutes brought them to a handsome lodge, with every thing about it in the most perfect order; the old woman who opened the gate looking like some venerable domestic of a kind master who had thus provided for her comfort.

"You think my conduct strange; but the riddle is soon read; I anticipate a thunder-storm. Had you not better rest in the lodge till it shall have passed? There is a shed for the horses."

"Then you really believe that I have an overweening care for my feathers," she replied, a little reproachfully.

"Indeed, I do not! It is I who fear lest you should get wet."

"Let us ride on, then: it will scarcely rain yet; and there is a farm-house outside the other lodge, where it would better please my father that we should rest."

"Why so?" he inquired, as they rode on through the park.

"Because my father and Mr. Astell are not on visiting terms."

"Yet you ride through his park."

"It is a public road."

"That is a pity, and a detriment to such a beautiful place, where art seems to have combined with nature to produce perfection. But perhaps it does not pass near the house."

"Very close, I am sorry to say."

"Why sorry?"

"I scarcely know, for I like to look upon the old house; but I believe I am sorry lest it should annoy Mr. Astell."

"Then you know him?"

"I have never even seen him."

"You are very philanthropic, to grieve for the annoyance of one whom you have never seen. If you feel thus for a stranger, what may not your friends hope?"

"I have not seen Mr. Astell, certainly; but I have heard many speak of him. The poor seldom name him without a blessing; and the village of Astell is a striking contrast to that of Ranford. At the first, order rules; at the last, disorder."

"Why not visit then? He must be your nearest neighbour."

"I know no other reason than disinclination. Mr. Astell is the only person, excepting poachers or fox-killers, of whom my father thinks or speaks with unfriendly feelings; and I have heard that he assisted those who contended for a right of way through Astell Park; but this happened before I was born."

"That is the reason, then, that you would not enter the lodge: but you do not mind riding through the park."

"I would not turn from the public road, and should have felt some delicacy in riding there, considering the share my father had had in throwing it open to the public, had Mr. Astell not sent a polite message begging none of the family to refrain on that account. I pass through but seldom, and my father never; though, I believe, in return he grants Mr. Astell permission to send carts through some of his fields. I once heard that there had been other disputed

points which had increased the unfriendly feeling between them."

" You do not know what first caused dissension?"

" I do not; unless the tale of an old woman in the village is correct, that he too had loved my mother, before he became possessed of Astell Court."

" Was your mother very beautiful?"

" So I have always heard."

" And you are like her?" inquired Edward, eagerly, thinking of the portrait at Beauchamp, to which he still sometimes fancied she bore a resemblance.

" What a many questions you ask! as I was told the other day, when, with more zeal, I fear, than wisdom, I was trying to settle a dispute concerning the rightful possession of a top."

" I admit the charge; but bear with me this once. Do you resemble your mother?"

" Some say so."

" Have you no portrait of Mrs. Conyers?"

" None. She never had her likeness taken.—But why do you question me so eagerly? You could not have known my mother, who died a few months after my birth."

" You may fairly ask; but my answer will scarcely assure you of my sanity. I was once so fascinated with a mere portrait, as to have it ever before me, sleeping or awake. Even now I cannot banish the belief that the original did not die broken-hearted, as they said, but that she will influence my future fate. You resemble the portrait when animated; but when silent, the expression is so different, that I scarcely remark a similitude of feature; it was this resemblance which induced my questions. Will you not pardon the impertinence, connected, as you are in my mind, with that beautiful portrait?"

" You wish to enlist my vanity on the side of your imagination," she said with a heightened colour. It could not have been my mother; and I know nothing but your roaming the world like the knights errant of the olden times in search of the original,—some captive princess, doubtless."

" Do not send me from you for my folly! Rather let me believe you the original—the lovely one who is to influence my destiny."

A vivid flash of lightning startled her horse before Mabel could reply—the thunder rolled in the distance, and a large rain-drop fell on the upturned brow of the young man as he gazed on the heavy sky.

"There is no time to lose—the clouds will pour down their torrents in less than five minutes;" and Edward," seizing the rein of her horse, which was curveting at the lightning, forced it into a gallop. "Keep your hand down, and a firm seat. Now to show your horsemanship!" he added, as the lightning flashed before her face, and the thunder rolled above her head with a thousand echoes, her steed bounding and starting at every flash and roll.

"Had I not been so interested in our subject, I should have marked the clouds, and better provided for your safety. Do not slacken your speed, or raise your hand; the rain will be here in a few moments, and with this lightning you must not shelter under a tree.—And this owing to my folly!" he muttered, as he rode on by her side, keeping his eye on her starting horse, ready to seize the rein again, should he see the slightest occasion, though the former character of Fury made him loath to do so without absolute need.

Mabel seemed much less alarmed than he could have expected; and though she was very pale, her sweet voice reassured him.

"Do not fear for me; I do not fear for myself when you are near."

He felt that she confided in him:—he would not have yielded that conviction for all the world could give.

The lightning flashed more brightly—the thunder, with its quick sudden crashes and hollow rolling, followed more closely, and her horse every moment became less manageable; whilst Fury, who had hitherto conducted himself admirably, showed symptoms of rebellion as the vivid light shot across his eye-balls. Still Edward Elton kept up the speed of both, and an exclamation of thankfulness burst from his lips, as a sudden turn in the road placed Astell Court before him, in all the grandeur of the past, and the order of the present.

It was a beautiful specimen of the architecture of the time of James the First; but though the hue of the gray stone was softened and harmonized by age, there was not

one symptom of decay;—nor, like the Grange, did it show how families had increased, and wealth diminished. There were no ill-proportioned excrescences to shock the critical: if the house had been added to it since its erection,—which, from its arrangement, appeared improbable,—those additions had been in the same style, and formed no dissight. The park, the lawn, the house, were in perfect keeping. An elegant iron railing defended the beautiful shrubs on the lawn (some in their full spring bloom and loveliness, flinging their fragrance far around,) from the incursion of the deer; whilst superb bronze gates at each extremity admitted visitors.

Edward's quick glance saw much of this in an instant, and, ever ready for action and prompt in his measures, he decided at once on placing Mabel in safety beneath the projecting porch, urged to greater decision by the increasing unruliness of her horse, and the large drops that began to fall. One of the bronze gates stood open as though to invite their entrance: and he did not consider the standing of a gentleman, probably Mr. Astell, at a window, as any bar to his project.

"Be not alarmed! another minute will place you in safety within the porch," he said, springing from his own horse, and seizing the rein of hers, which was now plunging violently, and dragging him on by main force towards the house.

"Not there!—my father may not like it."

"Let the fault be mine—this is no time to hesitate;" and before she could reply, he had lifted her from the saddle and borne her within the porch.

A flash—so full, so vivid, that it gleamed as the flaring of torches into the dark porch, showing the pale face of Mabel to her preserver, and dazzling the sight, lit up the heavens for a moment, making the sky like a vault of flame. There was a strange and rushing sound, as of a mighty rocket passing through the air—a cry of pain—and then a heavy fall, whilst the thunder crashed and rolled. Ere the light had died away, the clouds poured down their torrents, as though the bounds of nature had been burst, and some airy sea was dashing down upon the earth. The smoke rose up from the ground like a mist; but through it could be seen, stretched on the velvet lawn, torn with its struggles in the death-pang, the horse from which Mabel had been snatched

—the lately flashing eye now glazed, the lately bounding limb now motionless.

Mabel's head sank unconsciously on the shoulder of her preserver as she understood her deliverance, and murmured her gratitude to him and to her God; whilst earth held not happier heart than Edward Elton's as he pressed the cold hand placed in his to tell her thanks, better than her faltering words.

"Pray come into the house," urged some one beside them, whose first address had been unheeded.

"I shall be obliged to you, for I fear Miss Conyers is fainting," replied Edward to the kind entreaty of the owner of the mansion; a tall thin man, slightly bowed, with a high forehead, and features impressed with intellect and benevolence.

"I am better now—not faint," said Mabel, withdrawing from the support of her preserver with a conscious blush, though her faltering step was a proof that the support had not been unrequired.

The porch had been so dark, and Mabel's face so completely turned away, that Mr. Astell had no idea to whom he was giving shelter, till she entered the library, when his sudden start and changing cheek proved his instant recognition:—years had not effaced the sufferings of his youth.

"Miss Conyers! I cannot be mistaken;—there are your mother's brow and eye, and her angel smile."

Tears dimmed his eyes as he looked into her pale face, and his hand shook as he led her to her seat. For a few moments neither spoke;—a cloud came over the gazer's brow—his features wore a saddened expression—the past came up before him. His guests respected his sorrow and were silent; and, after a time, recovering from his reverie, he ruled himself to play the host.

"Pardon me, Miss Conyers, for this inattention—this forgetfulness; it should not have been, but I had never hoped to see her child beneath my roof, looking so like her too when we first met. I fear I may not believe that you came voluntarily to cheer an old man's desolation; but if I must thank the storm for your presence, I will still bid you welcome. May I not hope that Mabel Duncombe's child will regard me as a friend?" taking her hand kindly within his.

" You are silent ! Do not think I am at enmity with Philip Conyers : that has long since passed away. I would have you look upon me as a second father : I loved your mother —will not her child regard me as a friend ? Will she not sometimes come and see me ?"

The tears stood in Mabel's eyes ; for she thought how hard it was to be parted from those we love—and harder still to love, and not be loved again.

" I will—I do regard you as a friend ; and, with my father's leave, will see you often."

" Your father !" he exclaimed abruptly ; then checking himself, added more calmly : " yes : he has a right to your love and duty. Tell him that he who loved Mabel Duncombe, and saw her given to another, pleads to him for the visits of her child. He cannot—will not refuse."

" I hope not," she said ; but she spoke doubtfully.

" And you will plead for my wishes ?"

" Indeed I will ; they are my own."

" Thank you ! your mother, were she living, would wish it should be so. I am but a neglectful host, or I should have ordered refreshments, and welcomed your companion, to whom you are so much indebted. It was a fearful sight, that falling bolt ! Will you introduce me, Miss Conyers ? We are old friends already," he added with a smile.

" Mr. Elton," said Mabel, blushing as she named him.

The young man advanced from the window to which he had delicately turned during the late conversation.

Mr. Astell started back in greater agitation than when he had looked on Mabel.

" The very same ! though years have passed—and yet not quite the same," he murmured, while his guests looked on him in surprise.

" Who are you that stand before me, as of old, young and full of strength, whilst I am worn and weary ? Tell me quickly !" he exclaimed, going close up to Edward, and looking keenly into his face.

" My name is Edward Elton, sir."

Mr. Astell shook his head with a mournful look, and turned away.

" I knew not that the past could have so unmanned me, as to make me think the grave had given up its dead. No ! no ! all I loved are in the tomb—they live but in my memo-

ry!" Then mastering his emotion, he again advanced to the young man with an extended hand. "I beg your pardon for this strange reception. Your likeness to one I highly regarded, now long since dead, must plead as my excuse; and were it only for that likeness, and the service you have this day done to Mable Conyers, you must look upon me as a friend; and tax my friendship, should you want its aid."

Edward thanked him warmly, though with no idea of ever availing himself of his offer; and refreshments being ordered, Mr. Astell played the polite and hospitable host.

The storm having ceased, Edward proposed sending to the Grange for the carriage to convey Miss Conyers home, but Mr. Astell's had long since been ordered to be in readiness; and though Mabel, with some of her former awe of her father, feared his disapproval, she could not bring herself to decline an offer so kindly made. In her embarrassment she looked to Edward, who settled the point at once, by accepting the proffered carriage, saying, that as Mr. Conyers had committed her to his care, he was bound to arrange for her safe return.

Mr. Astell smiled as he saw her appealing look, and heard his reply; and the young man coloured at the smile, sad as it was.

"Remember your promise to plead my wishes to your father," said Mr. Astell, as he handed his fair guest to the carriage.

"I will not forget."

"Then I shall see you soon again."

"I hope so;" and the carriage drove on, leaving Edward to mount Fury, who, when deserted by his master, had with laudable sagacity discovered the way to the stables, where he had been well taken care of.

"The young fancy life perpetual sunshine. Not so! there are storms—destroying—devastating—as that which has passed. There are faithless friends, and other perils in our paths. You tread on flowers now—should these fade, or your path become rough, apply to me; I may bid the flowers rebloom—may smooth the rugged path. Come boldly. Now farewell!"

Before Edward could reply to this singular address, Mr. Astell had re-entered the house; and the young man, mount-

ing his impatient horse, was in a few minutes riding by the side of the carriage, and talking to Mabel, each vying with the other in praise of Mr. Astell, lauding his kindness, his talents, his elegant manners, his varied information, shown in his remarks on the treasures of his library.

The squire had been very anxious and fidgetty for his daughter's safe return, (the lightning having shivered a tree in the park,) though the remembrance that Edward was with her had checked his alarm; and, in his joy at her providential escape, he was far less annoyed than Mabel had expected on learning where she had taken shelter; nay, he approved of the whole of young Elton's conduct, who took the blame upon himself: and on hearing Mr. Astell's message, promised that she should call upon him occasionally. The strongest symptoms of his former unfriendly feelings not being quite subdued, were the greatness of his donation to the servants accompanying the carriage, and his sudden order to Mabel during the evening to send Mr. Astell some rare Indian sweetmeats, the present of a distant relative, whom he had once assisted. From those he liked, the squire took as frankly as he gave; from those he did not like, he could ill endure accepting a favour; or, if compelled to do so, his first thought was to repay it fourfold.

"What service will you do me next?" said Mr. Conyers, grasping the young man's hand. "Think if I had lost Mabel! I should have been a blighted tree indeed!—no one to smile on me, no one to nurse me, for I may not have another child alive;" and the squire grew sad at the thought, for he had learnt, during his illness, the value of the tender cares of love; the touching beauty of the smile of affection. He had felt there are words, and looks, too precious for the mines of earth to purchase; he had begun to feel the spell of home, how its gentle ties can be as bonds upon the soul—as fetters on the heart, too soft to gall, too strong to burst. He felt as he had never felt since his wife's death, and scarcely then; for, though not of keen penetration, he had understood there was little sympathy between them—a mist before the sunshine of her love. He loaded her with gifts—he would have yielded her his favourite hunter (what he prized most, next to herself,) had she desired it: he absolutely sent to Paris to procure her ornaments, though blaming himself the while as a bad patriot, and she received

all with smiles and gentle thanks; and yet he had a fancy, though he knew not on what grounded, that she was not happy, and that she loved him not as he loved her. She never thwarted him—he sometimes wished she had—his will was ever her law: but then she was so silent, so quiet; and, except with regard to her children, appeared to have no desire—to take no interest—and her smile was sad, even when she looked on them. He did not comprehend the symptoms of a breaking heart—of a gentle, loving being sinking unresistingly beneath its sorrow—withering—dying—as the tender woodbine torn from the trunk to which it clung.

The squire was a man ruled by habits rather than impressions—little subject to sudden impulses; and, though one of the kindest of human beings, not formed to be the victim of a lasting sorrow. He disliked new things, unless they harmonized with his old customs; but these new things once become old, were firmly established in his favour. He felt much more for the loss of his wife than many had imagined possible, but habit and hunting soon reconciled him to the change. Many years had elapsed since his home had been endeared to him by the smiles of affection; but it still possessed powerful attractions in his eyes, from having been the abode of his ancestors for centuries, and his own since his birth, to say nothing of its excellent cellar, stables, and kennels. Shunning female society since the death of Mrs. Conyers; having no relatives residing near; holding book-learning in no great repute; with an active body and indolent mind, hunting became a habit—a necessary excitement; and, yielding to the opinions of his time amongst country squires, he rated a man's strength, wisdom, and good fellowship, according to the quantity of wine he could drink without dropping from his chair. This yielding was, particularly in the first instance, rather what he considered a good-natured compliance with the wishes of others, or from the necessity of showing his hospitality as host, than from inclination; but a short time inured him to the sight of an immortal being depriving himself of reason—his noblest gift, his highest distinction—with a want of self-control not equalled by the brute, with only instinct for his guidance. He not only learned to look on this sinking to a level with the brute, in others, without disgust, but to

practise the same himself, when tempted by a carouse; and to speak of it with a levity which, in the present day, would shock even those who shun not the debasing sin as they should; but his late accident, and long confinement, had awakened more serious and desirable thoughts. Withdrawn from the vortex of evil habit; not subject to the solicitations of his riotous companions; tended and watched over by his gentle child, who had been taught to know the corruption of man's natural heart, (though only judging severely of herself,) and conversing with Edward Elton, for whom his affection and esteem continued to increase, and who, however the pride and presumption of youth and a high spirit might sometimes lead him into error, usually judged acts by the word of God—not by the wills of men; the squire began to acquire a better knowledge of his duties to his Creator and his brother man; and when sufficiently recovered to kneel beside his child and his young guest in the simple village church, his prayers were characterised by a fervour and humility which they had not before possessed. No longer a form of words carelessly uttered, they were the outpouring of a heart that, brought to consider the error of its ways by a providential escape from sudden death, and subdued by suffering, turned to its Maker and its Saviour with a faith and lowliness which it had never felt before. Kind, generous, and honourable, the squire had long received the praise of man; but in self-knowledge, and self-denial, he had been lamentably deficient. His had been hitherto a darkened mind, but a better light was dawning on it: time was to show if the Sun of Righteousness would shine upon him in his noonday glory. He began to think with regret and disgust of the riotous revels in which he had once borne a part; and to more than suspect that as the master of a household, and the possessor of property, it was his duty to look to the morals and the comforts of his dependants. These convictions were, as yet, but faintly imprinted on his mind; for, as we have said, he was not a man of sudden impulses: but they were deepening as time rolled on. He was becoming an altered person; changed in his principle of action—unchanged in many of his tastes. The days were not long in the society of Mabel and Edward, though the hunting was over—the shooting not commenced; and when a letter arrived from Mr. Durnsford announcing a speedy visit, he re-

ceived the intelligence, and repeated it to his daughter, with an indifference strongly opposed to the pleasure with which such an announcement had hitherto been heard. His home did not now require Mr. Durnsford's presence to make it pleasant.

And how did Mabel receive the news? With the remark: "Mr. Durnsford was very kind, and cured me of some of my fears."

How did Edward Elton hear of the visit? With a slight start—and the question: "Who is Mr. Durnsford?"

"An old friend of mine, who gave Mabel good advice about ruling horses and dogs. I have no doubt you will like him," replied the-squire.

"As the friend of yourself, and Miss Conyers, I shall be sure to do so," said the young man with a cleared-up brow.

CHAPTER XI.

It was a lovely day in June when Mr. Conyers, now quite recovered, entered the drawing-room where Mabel sat at her embroidery, with Edward at a little distance, sometimes reading Milton, sometimes pointing out the beauties of the author to his attentive listener, sometimes looking at the fair girl in silence, and bending towards her to catch the tones of her low, sweet voice.

"I have been consulting the mason about repairing the lodge as you suggested, and he thinks it will answer admirably. You are a treasure, Edward! I wonder how we got on without you! Indeed, I can scarcely fancy there was a time when you were not here, I am so accustomed to regard you as a fixture. Would that you were my son!"

"Would that I were!" replied the young man with a start of pleasure.

"Thank you for the wish, my boy; you must consider me as a parent, then!" exclaimed the gratified squire, laying his hand on his shoulder; in semblance, or in reality, perfectly unconscious of any plan by which this might be accomplished. "Poor Philip!" continued the squire with a sigh, "I wish he had never left me, or that he would return like you. He is long in coming, and I pine now as I never pined before to hold him in my arms—to lay my blessing on his head. I used to think the blame all his; but lately I have feared that I was quick, and rash; I should have been more indulgent to his youth, the wilfulness of a mere boy, whom, it may be, I had let run too wild. I fear that I have

neither ruled myself, nor others, as I should have done ; but the bold and the strong do not think how soon death may come—do not like to own themselves weak and erring. They are hardened when they should be grateful, you must teach me better, Mabel : speak to me of my good sister, who would fain have made me as herself. I used to laugh at her fancies, as I called them ; but a sick bed teaches other lessons. Bless you, Mabel!" kissing his daughter's brow, who had risen and passed her arm round his neck. "Oh that my boy were here to share the blessing ! Sometimes the thought will cross me that he will come, but not till I am gone. If so, tell him I bless—I pardon him ! and, if I have erred, he must forgive me. I have my misgivings, though Durnsford would not say I had been harsh. I never guessed he would have taken me at my word. Mind, Mabel, that I leave my blessing for him."

"Leave it? Oh no, give it!"

"I pray it may be so ! but I have no right to expect it, and have strong forebodings."

"The lingering effects of your late illness," said Edward, taking his hand.

"It may be so," replied the squire more gaily, recovering from a mood so unusual to him. "Away with you, girl ! you will choke me," he continued, putting the clinging Mabel gently from him. "Away with you, I say, I promised Martha Wilford that you should go and see her."

"Martha Wilford ! If you have been talking with her, no wonder at forebodings ! But surely she has no wish for my presence : I am no favourite of hers."

"She came out as I passed her gate, remarking in her usual ungracious tone, that she had been ill—as she had heard I had been, and bade me take care, for death came when none thought of his coming ; and then she added, with her awful manner, that you must go down to see her, for that she had vowed never to sit down within the Grange, till my boy came back."

"I hope you did not promise I should go," observed Mabel discomposed.

"As an old servant, I did not like to deny her ; and she is an awful person to gainsay. You are not afraid, Mabel?"

"Not afraid," said Mabel with a heightened colour ; "but there is a something so strange about her, and the villagers

tell such wild tales, and she frowned so on me the only time I ever saw her, that I would gladly avoid the visit."

"Strange manners, and wild tales indeed!" repeated her father musingly, recurring to the past. "I could never understand—and did not like her. Not that I believe what the silly people say about a dark figure in the churchyard at night, and the ground disturbed in the morning, and strange sights and sounds about her dwelling. All nonsense!" Yet the squire did not look as if he thought it all nonsense; and his voice was not as loud as usual. "This is nothing: she nursed Philip well—doted on him, and has never been the same since he went, though I think she fostered his bold spirit. You should go, were it only for her love to him; and you need not be afraid, for she desired that Edward should accompany you."

"I, sir?" asked Edward in surprise.

"Why, I thought she would not see strangers," remarked Mabel, her terror gone at this announcement.

"Yes: you, Edward; she says you saw her once, and promised to go again. I think she muttered something about her cat."

"I saved her cat from some dogs; and got scratched for my gallantry, and rated into the bargain, for she thought at first I had set the animals on; but when I denied the cruelty, she stared in my face as if I had been some marvellous monster, insisted on my going into her cottage, washed my scratches, and persisted in arranging my hair, all which courtesies I would fain have declined, for, though professing the most friendly feelings, there was a something so grim and awful in her attentions, that I could not prize them as I should. I hope she is not going to claim me as an old acquaintance, or I shall take to a mask. Ever since I began my wanderings, I have encountered persons who appeared to know me; even you, I fancied, looked keenly at me when first we met."

"So I do now, sometimes. Your face never seemed strange to me—yet I cannot make out whom you are like: but then, to be sure, I never did remember people's names and not always their features."

"I am half afraid to encounter strangers, these recognitions are so awkward; and no one ever tells me whom I resemble," observed Edward, a little provoked. "If I must

go to the old woman, I will compel her to tell the name of my shadow."

"I do not think the Evil One himself could compel her to what she did not like," remarked the squire, drily. "They say she can read fortunes—you had better get her to tell yours and Mabel's—and you can ask of Philip's," he added with assumed indifference, but real earnestness, thereby proving that however unimaginative was his general character, there was a little superstition in its composition.

"I will try what knowledge I can acquire," replied Edward, gaily; and in a few minutes he and Mabel were on their way to Nurse Wilford's cottage.

"Have you a brother, then?" inquired Edward of his companion. "I never but once before heard such a relative alluded to; and then so vaguely, that, concluding he had died, I asked no questions."

"I hope I have a brother, though I have never seen him; and the subject is so painful to my father that I rarely name it. I have heard from others, that he was a fine, high-spirited boy, indulged by his nurse, who doted on him, as did my father once. I do not know how that love was lessened, though I believe my brother did not always show a child's obedience; but spoke proudly, (requiring what could not be granted,) and on refusal threatened to run away. In the heat of the moment, my father dared him to the act:—the next morning he was gone, and only a few lines left to say that he would not return till he had acquired an independence; but that, should he die in the endeavour, his death should be duly notified. He was quite a boy then. From that time, notwithstanding every inquiry, nothing was heard of him for years, till he wrote to my father asking forgiveness, and requesting permission to visit the Grange on returning from voyage which he was on the point of undertaking. The permission and forgiveness were readily granted, and for some time he was daily expected; but many months have passed since then, and he is still away. I heard most of this from Mr. Durnsford, who is anxious for his return, seeing how much my father's heart is set upon it. Martha Wilford was his nurse, and disliked me from the idea that I might rival him in the affections of my parents: it is strange, therefore, that she should send for me."

"She cannot dislike you now," remarked Edward, look-

ing at the lovely face set off by its becoming chip hat—the white bodice tight to the delicate shape, with the full flounced skirt—and the little feet in their pointed shoes, that trod the turf as lightly and as noiselessly as though a spirit moved beside him.

Edward was right: Martha Wilford did not dislike her now, whatever she might have done in former times. She came out of her cottage to meet her guests; and if her manner was strange, wayward, and at times awful, it was still evident that her views towards both were friendly. She ushered them into her little parlour with a greeting and demeanour far above her station; and if there was a something chilling even in her kindness, it appeared the consequence of her long habit of seclusion, or peculiar turn of mind, not any deficiency in good will. Mabel would have preferred taking a seat on the bench in the garden, the flowers glowed so brightly beneath the summer sun, the birds sang so sweetly from the verdant boughs, and the bees flitted from sweet to sweet, with such a soothing, happy hum; but her hostess would not permit it, and, as Mr. Conyers had said, there was that in Martha Wilford which made no one anxious to gainsay her. She seldom left her rather lonely abode, except from necessity: she received no suspicious-looking visitors—no evil deed was proved against her; if any had the boldness to consult her, she gave good, if not palatable advice, for mind or body; she interfered—she quarrelled—with none, and yet rarely was being more dreaded, or more censured; but the latter always under the breath, with a sharp glance over the shoulder to make sure that the black dame, as the children had named her from her dress, was beyond hearing; for though none could clearly explain on what the idea was grounded, the existence of the idea was certain—not a villager but believed that the dame was possessed of powers beyond ordinary women—in plain language, most thought her leagued with the Wicked One; and her constant attendant, the large tabby cat, (the one saved by Edward,) was looked on with dread as a familiar spirit. Such fancies among ignorant villagers were almost universal at the time of this tale; and witches and cats, the latter generally black, were considered inseparable. The black dame was too keen not to know the estimation in which she was held; but, either as a matter of indifference,

or pleasure, since it saved herself and cat from molestation and the visits of the village gossips, she took no pains to dispel the evil opinion. The birds built unmolested in her garden, for no boy was bold enough to enter her domains even to rob a nest; if she met any in her rare walks, the curties could not have been lower had she been the lady that, in good truth, she looked; and if a frown came on her brow as she marked the terror of the children, or overheard the mother hush their infant's cries by the horror of her name, it made no change in her mode of life, and the muttered words: "Fools! they make bug-bears to frighten themselves, as well as their children," had more of scorn than of wrath. If none could prove that she committed an evil deed, all could tell that she omitted a good one. The black dame had not been seen at church since the departure of her nursling; he seemed the only link that had bound her to society, and when he went she stood alone—apart from her kind—like some solitary tree scathed by the lightning.

Such was the woman, who, with a stately air more befitting a queen than an ex-nurse-maid, insisted on her young guests entering her parlour, instead of lingering in the garden.

"No;" she said, in a decided tone, "leave the flowers to the bees, and the sunshine to the birds, and all bright things to the young who have known neither sin nor sorrow; but the darkness and the shadow suit the black dame, and she must have her way. Thwart her not! she seeks your good, but she will not be crossed. She is lonely and stricken, but she has not yet fallen. Let those beware who dare her power! Enter!"

Mabel did as commanded, but drew closer to Edward, as she did so. Martha Wilford saw the motion, and read its meaning.

"Why do you fear me, Mabel Conyers? I served your mother—I would serve you, and I can serve you, though you think it not. If I smiled not on you as a babe, what of that? I am changed since then, and war not with the gentle. And you, Edward Elton, why do you look as though you, too, feared?"

"Fear! and a woman!" replied the young man, indignantly. "I fear you not."

For some moments each gazed keenly into the face of the other, and then the woman turned away.

"True! You fear me not, and you need not fear me, for I would serve you both. You fear none, for you come of a bold and daring race—ay, and a proud one too, though a courteous: but look that your pride come not before a fall. Ask your father if such things cannot be? If one shock of the earthquake may not level all?"

"What do you know of me or my father?" he inquired, eagerly.

"That one flies from men—the other to them. That the one trusts none, and the other trusts all, and each deems himself the wisest," replied the woman, calmly, and as though smiling at the folly of both.

"Where learnt you this?" he demanded, starting at the knowledge which she displayed.

"Where learnt I this!" she replied with a scornful smile. "Is this such wondrous knowledge? An idiot could have read it in that bold, open brow, and frank address."

"Pshaw! But how know you of my father?"

"How know I many things? Ask the cottagers who bush their babies with my name."

"This is folly," replied the young man, quickly, though involuntarily influenced by her mysterious manner. "I am neither idiot nor coward, that I should believe in your supernatural powers."

"Believe as you please. The idiot lingers on his way—the coward fears to ask his own heart—Why?"

Edward Elton started, and his cheek flushed the deeper as he caught her triumphant smile.

"Woman! who are you?"

"The decider of your fate, and the fate of others."

"It is false? Under heaven, I decide my fate myself."

The woman laughed a scornful laugh.

"Why, the toils will be round you ere you know them set,—the destroyer on you ere you guess him for a foe. I know you, boy: there is no heart more easily insnared. Such as your father was, such are you."

"Again I ask, what know you of my father or of me? Have we met before?" looking at her.

"Well! what say you? Have we met before?" she demanded coldly, meeting his scrutiny.

"No!" he replied, after vainly endeavouring to recall her features to his mind.

"Wrong! we have met before," laying her hand on his arm.

"Where? where?"

"No matter—ask not where?" she said, in a tone from which all bitterness had vanished, whilst her features lost their stern expression, and the hand upon his arm trembled as she looked upon him. "Ask not!—enough that we have met. I am not as callous as men deem me; the heart, though seared by wrongs, has still some kindly feelings left; and as I look on you, the visions of my younger days come back upon me. Younger and happier days; ere I listened to the charmer—ere I yielded to the tempter. Boy! boy!" and she grasped his arm with iron force, whilst her glance was wild, and her frame convulsed—"look you to your steps, if you would keep light heart and open brow! Tread not the ways of crime!—the guilty know no rest! Slaves—bondsmen to their sin—there is no peace by day or night. The sun but shines to mock—the midnight stillness is rebuke!" Then, marking his surprise, she continued more calmly, "I have said that I would serve you, but not yet: there is another dearer still, who must be righted first; and there is one I would still spare. Be patient, and be wary!"

"How may I trust you, if I know you not? and how can you serve me?" he demanded, feeling the power of her strange and commanding manner, and yet unwilling to admit that he did so;—"Give me some sign!" She bent towards him, and her low whisper came distinctly on his ear.

"That portrait at Beauchamp Park!—You shall stand in her presence—her arms around your neck—her lips upon your brow!"

"When?—where?" he demanded eagerly.

But the woman turned away in silence; and a little malice mingled in her quiet smile as she placed chairs for her guests, and motioned them to be seated.

"Tell me," he demanded, still more eagerly, "whose is that portrait, and when shall we meet?"

She was still silent, looking as though she saw him not.

"At least tell me how you know of my visit to Beauchamp? Strange, that all know me and I know none!"

"How I know?" she repeated, in an elevated tone. "Have I not said that I have means of knowledge which you know not of? There are tidings come on the night-wind to the

lonely listener; there are signs and tokens in the summer sky to her who reads them rightly. Be ruled by her who sees and hears what the dull and the blind see not, hear not."

"This is worse than folly, woman: I believe not such things. I am not to be ruled by aught but reason."

"By reason or by interest will I rule you, then," she replied, after a brief scrutiny. "You are not quite as unbelieving as you would seem; yet I cannot rule you as I would the multitude. I will stand your friend the more for this very boldness, but I will not be crossed, or hurried on."

"Then you will tell me of that portrait?"

"No; I have said of the past all I will say now! Vex me not by farther questions!" waving her hand with a haughty motion to enforce his silence.

It was a splendid picture! that low dark room, with its raftered ceiling—its black oak mantel-piece—its small casement, partly shaded by ivy and dark creepers; and the noon-day sun shining in through the leafy screen, with strong and garish light upon the bold open brow and glowing cheek of the youth; on the gentle and touching beauty of the timid maiden; and on that awful woman, in her black dress and snow-white cap, seated in a high-backed chair, opposite to her young guests,—the remains of her haughty beauty still to be seen—her keen dark eye flashing with the consciousness of power—the seeming humility with which her hands were crossed on her bosom belied by her proud bearing! It was a study for a Rembrandt, with its deep shadows and its strong gleaming lights—the passion and pride of the old, and the frankness and gentle beauty of the young!

And she,—the hostess!—that stern and haughty woman—but a menial? How could she sit there as a queen, commanding, receiving the homage of her vassals?—as a judge, pronouncing doom?

After a brief silence, she spoke abruptly, her searching gaze fixed on the timid Mabel, who half started from her seat at the sharp question,

"Why is not Philip Conyers returned to his father's house?"

"I know not," replied Mabel, timidly.

"You know not!—and who should know but a sister?"

"I have never seen—I have never heard from my brother."

"But your father—he has heard?"

"Not for months: not since he wrote to promise him a welcome."

There was a change of expression in the dark dame's features; but her guests could not read its meaning. Neither made a comment; and she continued more impressively, bending as though not to lose one single tone—one changing look.

"Speak, Mabel Conyers! and speak truly! Do you wish that brother to return?"

"So much—so very much! If you know where he is, implore him to return. My father pines for his presence!"

The keenness of her scrutiny relaxed, for it was impossible to doubt the speaker's sincerity; and a gleam of satisfaction lit up her care-worn features.

"Enough! he shall return! I see—I know it. He shall stand in his father's halls—he shall rule on his father's lands!—but neither I nor Philip Conyers shall behold it!"

Her exultation died away as she concluded, and the raised arm sank by her side. "A dark web has been woven!—there was fraud in the warp, and wrong in the woof! Wrong!—foul wrong! and blood may flow ere the web be unravelled;—but it shall be unravelled, though that blood should be mine, or dearer than mine! Away, away!—I will be weak no more," sinking back in her chair with a shudder, her eyes glaring as though she had seen some fearful sight.

"I know not why you called us hither; but if only to listen to dark denunciations, it would have been better had I come alone," remarked Edward Elton, seeing Mabel's dread. "If you have been wronged, tell me at some other time, and I will right you, if in my power."

"If I have been wronged!" she exclaimed, with startling vehemence:—"If I have been wronged! And have I not?—You right me! What can that arm do?—did I ask its aid? Whilst Martha Wilford lives, she can right herself! Yet you meant it kindly, and I thank you," she added, in a softer tone. "Fear me not, Mabel Conyers; I loved your mother—I will seek your good; but I would not that you became an heiress by your brother's death!"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Mabel, fervently.

"You are a good child!" said the black dame, in a tone of endearment that sounded strangely from her lips. "I will tell your fortune: there are who say that I know all things,"—and, rising abruptly, she took from a cupboard some singularly marked cards.

"But, stay; it must not be said that Martha Wilford is inhospitable:—you shall eat and drink under my roof. Mabel Conyers and Edward Elton—her daughter and his son; and that they should meet beneath the roof of Martha Wilford!—that she should hold the balance of their fate! Strange!—yet stranger things may come to pass! Eat—drink!" and she placed plain eake and currant wine before them. "Pledge me!—‘May the house of Conyers never be without male heir!’"

She marked her guests as they repeated her words, and was satisfied.

"We thank you, and wish you good morning," said Edward, seeing that his hostess was arranging her cards, and that Mabel by no means liked the proceeding.

"Stay!" exclaimed the woman, in a commanding tone, without looking up; "I will read your fates!"

"Thank you; but we are contented to act them."

"It is false! you object not to the reading, only to the reader; and but for the maiden, you would linger to hear of that portrait. For your own sakes, I bid you remain; I can work my own will without heeding your good. Draw!" she said to Mabel, advancing towards her with the sorted cards.

Mabel mechanically obeyed, acting under the influence of that wild dark eye, till she had chosen nine, which her hostess arranged on the table, and then bade her, in the same commanding tone, draw near and listen to her fate.

"Mark my words!—mine are not the flattering tales of the bribed soothsayer! Look! there are few marks here for your childhood, for it was scanty in events. That dark line is your aunt’s death: she liked me not, and I liked her not, for I could not rule her. She judged me as she saw men—neither as gently nor as harshly as she might; but I would give this right hand, and that too," (extending both,) "to have her thoughts on my dying bed—to trust as she trusted:—but it cannot be."

She paused a moment, and then resumed.

"Now come cross marks and tangled lines. You will love, and the long summer day be but as an hour in his presence—the young, the frank, and the light-hearted!—but this will not last. Fraud will cross your path—deceit will twine around you; a ruder lover will propose, favoured by one who can command! You will seek advice from the deceiver;—take care that he tangle you not in his toils, with his fair words, whilst he whom you love is afar! See! here is a large space, wherein are many figures indistinctly marked—signs of trouble and crossing plans;—beyond two courses—one fair, and straight, and happy—the other, dark and crooked. It means, that the tracing of your fate is in your own hands. Your mother loved one, but wedded another: she yielded to threats and entreaties, and died of a broken heart! Let Mabel Conyers look to it, that she tread not the same path! that she suffer not the same doom! Let her believe no evil report, yield to no threat, bend to no pleading. Let her not waver!—let her not doubt!—and the summer day of love, though clouds may mar its glory for awhile, shall neither end in sorrow nor in death! Be warned! your doom is read!" and, shuffling the selected cards with the others, she turned from the trembling Mabel, and held the pack to Edward, bidding him draw.

"Why not advise without this mummery? I doubt not your wisdom; and the pretended reading of unmeaning marks will not increase its value in my eyes."

"Draw!" she repeated, with a haughty gesture; "or I read not your fate."

He drew—and, as he felt her keen gaze fascinating him to the choice she desired, his heart beat less regularly.

That she was sincere in her belief that what she said would come to pass, he could not doubt, and it was to this sincerity that she owed her influence; but that she won wisdom from the cards, he did not credit, though whence her knowledge came, he could not guess. The cards were again chosen, the same mystic number—nine, and arranged as before.

For some moments she bent over them, as though the uncouth marks, (unintelligible to others,) had for her a secret

meaning ; then pointing to them with her long thin finger, and alternately glancing from them to Edward, she began to tell his fortunes, past and to come ; her tone every moment becoming more elevated, and her eyes gleaming with wilder light, whilst the listener held his breath to catch every tone of the awful being before him ; who looked like some inspired Pythoness of old.

" There is joy, and rejoicing ! an heir is born ! one of a proud line—the mother smiles in love—the father glows with pride. There is wealth and grandeur round him : the cares of many, and the love of two, who love him with that love which doth not die—with the same love where-with they have loved each other. Joy lingers not—it has wings, and flies away. Riches abide not with the careless and the wasteful, who give to each and all, content, as interest, to receive the shouts and flatteries of the crowd. The rich man has become poor—the spendthrift is a beggar ; the loving husband flies the loving wife ; the friend shuns the friend—misjudging, he yields to the guidance of a deceiver. The babe welcomed with shouts, cradled in splendour, hushed in a mother's arms, is branded with shame, rocked in a hut, stilled by a stranger, borne away at night as a felon's child. Dark and lonely are the days of childhood, yet the youth's spirit is not crushed ; the young gay heart is buoyant still, pining to go forth into the field of life, unknowing of the thorns which he shall gather. He saves a stranger on the high road from hired murderers—he shall be repaid ! the good rendered to another shall be returned unto himself.

" Age grows indolent, and would sit in the chimney-nook ; youth is active and impatient, and would range the world. The father, deceived more and less than he believes, has learnt to hate ; the youth, unwronged, loves all. Both lack wisdom. The lonely father abides at home, the youth departs—he would seek his fortune in the crowded city ; but he wanders from his road, he stands—where he dreams not of—before whom he does not know. A fair face—a pictured beauty stamps its image on his heart ; he heeds not the tale he hears—let him not, it is false !

" He goes on his way, but is won to linger by friendly words ; he watches by the sick bed, he lives on gentle smiles ; he who would have rushed to the crowded city

abides in the humble village; he who would win fortune is content to receive it at a maiden's hands."

The young man's eyes flashed at the charge, and he made a movement of dissent: the speaker paused not, but her succeeding words proved that she understood him.

"He knows not as yet the value of wealth—how the high and the low bow to a golden idol; he thinks only of the heart's priceless jewel—love! the love of the lovely, and the gentle, and the true. Let him take heed that he lose it not! that another wears not the pearl he covets! Let him not draw back for the lack of gold—gold shall be his in the time of need! One bowed with sorrow more than years, has proffered friendship, let him claim it frankly—boldly; it will not be withheld; and the time is coming when he will require it. There are dangers in the young man's path; one is blind who he thinks sees and approves, let him pause ere he opens his eyes—ere he ask what may be denied. A rude rival may be balanced by increasing regard; or withdraw his suit, for the pearl will not be set in gold, as some believe. But another rival comes! sparkling as the dancing stream! deep, dark as the stagnant pool! Let the youth be wise—be wary; now comes the trial of his life. He trusts to kindly words, and open smiles—they may not mean what he imagines. Smiles may give place to frowns—regard change to suspicion—suspicion into wrath. The words of the wily may cause this. Let the youth be cautious—let him trust no stranger—let him hint not his wishes for awhile. If esteem should seem to cool, let him heed it not; it shall grow warm again. Let him govern his temper as his acts, for he is quick of mood; let him linger on, still living on sunny smiles, which, if he be not rash, shall beam upon him for long years. As to the maiden, so to the youth—there are two paths before him. Will he choose as rashness shall impel him? Then will come parting from the maiden of his love—the triumph of deceit and wrong: wo to him! and wo to her! and wo to all. Will he choose as prudence shall advise?—will he hearken to the wise? Then shall a brilliant destiny be his. The deceiver thwarted: the maiden of his love his own—the arms of that pictured beauty clinging round him; a father's blessing and a father's smile; firm friends, a noble name, and the wealth which brings the homage of the lips,

but, more, dries up the mourner's tears. Will the youth pause? Will he mar all by rashness? Will he not wait and bear awhile? His fate is in his own hands; let him decide.

The lines are read! the doom is said!
The issue rests on his own head!"

She pushed the cards from before her.

"The words of knowledge have been spoken, wo to him who will not heed them. Tell not Philip Conyers what the black dame hath said. You hesitate!—say to him such is my wish; and add—let him come, and I will read his fate as I have read yours; my ban rests on all who repeat. Will he ask farther, think you? Come not near me till I call you; neither young man nor maiden. Ponder on my words—and now begone! I would be alone; there is a trial coming on, and the heart must commune with itself, and learn to bear it. Justice and revenge demand the sacrifice; but love pauses still. Love! can love linger yet? Begone, I say! Why stay you here? Would you read the secret of the outraged heart, and mock its pangs? Begone! begone!" stamping in passion, whilst her arm waved them away.

"One question," said Edward, recovering from the effect of her impassioned speech. "That portrait, was it—"

"It was none connected with the name of Elton," replied his hostess, with a mocking smile.

"Who then? And who is the stranger I should fear?"

"I will say no more. Begone! if you would not have me blight you with a curse—if you would still have me for a friend. I would be alone, for the spirits of the present and the past are coming round me, and none must see the conflict. Away! away! there is no peace for guilt!" again waving her arm for their departure.

"May we not sooth? Thiere is a peace for the sorrower for sin," said Mabel in a low sweet voice, though still clinging to Edward's arm for protection.

"You sooth!" exclaimed the haughty woman, with a fierceness which softened as she gazed on the gentle speaker. "No, no; not even Mabel Conyers can do that. There is no peace for the hardened sinner—for the haughty heart

that will not bend. Go!" she continued, with a gentleness, of which none believed her capable, taking Mabel's hand. "Go! may the blessing of your God be on you both; I dare not give you mine. Go! go!" gently putting them out, and closing the door behind them.

As they glanced in at the casement in passing, they saw Martha Wilfred rocking to and fro in her arm-chair, as though the frame was stirred by the strong passions of the mind. They passed out of the garden in silence, and up to the house, each heart busy with its own thoughts; and Edward--whispering, "Fear not; I will protect you!" as the still trembling Mabel relinquished his arm, to which she had clung till they reached the hall, was the only speech between them.

The black dame was a good judge of character. The squire asked no questions on hearing her message, and the laugh with which he declined consulting the oracle was not as joyous as usual.

CHAPTER XII.

RAIN will come even in June; and it came the next morning so heavy and continued, that walking or riding was beyond a doubt; so the squire and Edward, not much to the taste of the latter, went to the kennel, and next to the stable, where the young man left his host in the middle of a history to old Ned, of a famous run with a fine burst of forty minutes, and retraced his way to the drawing-room. Here he found Mabel at her spinnet, who, with the vanity of simple woman, believed his assertion that he would rather look at her than at the finest steed in Europe, and Arabia to boot,—rather listen to her sweet notes than to the cry of the finest pack of hounds in Christendom or Héathenesse. She heard, blushed, smiled, and more, believed. Alack! alack! what a simple creature woman is! She hath little wisdom in her love; she cannot doubt, for doubt were worse than death.

They sang together an "auld wold sang;" and Edward was looking into the fair face of the singer, when the falling of a book causing him to turn, he met the eyes of a stranger fixed keenly on him, with an expression so startling, so mingled, so compounded of many feelings, that to tell the one predominant was beyond his power. The startling expression vanished on the instant, and never met his view again.

"Well sung!" exclaimed the squire. "You were so intent that you did not hear us enter; and Mabel did not know she had so many listeners, or she would not have sung so

loud. Look, child! here is your favourite Durnsford come back; who says he and his cottage at Newton Marsh are ready to receive you as their mistress."

"Quite ready," said Mr. Durnsford, taking both Mabel's hands, which she yielded him frankly, scarcely even blushing when he raised them to his lips with a gallant expression of his pleasure at their meeting after so long an absence.

"There, Durnsford, that is enough; you will make Mabel vain—she has not heard such pretty things since your departure," remarked the laughing squire. "I shall really begin to think you as young as you profess to be, though I have known you these —"

"Hush! hush! Philip Conyers," interposed his guest with graceful gaiety. "What barbarous manners you have in this antediluvian village! To think of telling a gallant man of his age, and that too in the presence of the young lady whom he is resolved to bear away from all competitors! I have made the elixir of life a reality, which the world has so long considered an insane fancy: I am the age that Miss Conyers likes best, and shall never be older."

"I believe not," replied the squire, highly amused at the gaiety of his old friend, as he persisted in calling him. "But leave Mabel to consider your proposal, whilst I introduce my young favourite Edward Elton. He has been as a son to me, and as a son I regard him. You must be friends."

"I am Mr. Elton's friend already, if he will permit me to say so. His attentions to Philip Conyers make me his for life," replied Mr. Durnsford, holding out his hand.

"This is as it should be," remarked the delighted squire. "If my boy were but here, I should desire nothing more; but he tarries long;" and his smile saddened to a sigh.

"All in good time," observed Mr. Durnsford with cheering kindness. "Boys will be boys, and linger by the way. Wait patiently: I have no doubt, when you do meet, that he will show cause for the delay. Make allowance for his having been a little spoilt; you know I preached in vain on that point. But bachelors' wives, and children —you know the proverb. Take care, Miss Conyers; I intend to find, or make you the model of a wife."

"Reject him at once, Mabel," said the squire, forgetting his anxiety in his friend's lively remarks.

"Your gentle daughter will not drive me to despair: be-

sides, I will take no refusal. I intend to fit up a room expressly for her at Newton Marsh, with books, and music, and birds, and flowers, and no dogs—and mine she shall be."

The rest of the day passed in lively talk. The squire, yielding to his guest's humour, drank a little more than he had ventured on since his accident; his smile and his jest were ever ready in sympathy with the gaiety of Durnsford; and he dropped asleep with the full conviction that he had never spent a happier evening.

"That is just what I wished too see," he said to himself the following morning, when, on looking from the window, he saw his old and his young friend walking together on the lawn. "I was sure they would agree; and Durnsford met him so cordially! It is a good and a kind youth; I wish Philip may be like him. Durnsford made the best of it, as he always does of every thing; but it is plain that he thinks my boy delays unnecessarily, and a little disrespectfully. I dare say I did spoil him; and that makes him headstrong."

"Well, what do you think of Edward?" inquired the squire of his friend as they rode a little behind Mabel and young Elton later in the day.

"A little impetuous;—and perhaps, rather a high opinion of his own talents. But we must excuse these trifling blemishes in one so young, and with so many good qualities. He will mend of presumption—almost all young people have it—that is, the bold and active. This high opinion of their own powers appears requisite to their very daring—it gives them promptness and decision; and we graybeards must make allowances for youthful vanity, and put up with something like a lecture on the standstill notions of old age."

"I don't know what you mean," remarked the squire, somewhat bewildered by this long harangue. "I never saw presumption or youthful vanity in Edward Elton—he never tried to lecture me."

"Lecture you, my dear Conyers! No! no! he was not likely to do that:—you, to whom he owes so very much; taking him into your house, lending him your hunters, and treating him as an old and valued friend, though too poor to own even a pony. Others would have been afraid lest the young man should turn out a highwayman, or a barber's son,

or the like; but my kind friend Philip Conyers never suspected any one in his life—nor will, till he has been taken in. Then that splendid present of Fury should ensure his eternal gratitude. Why, it is a superb animal! worth four hundred;—and how well he rides it! Perhaps lecture was too strong a term; and I might not have understood him when he spoke of the prejudices of our forefathers, while you and I talk only of their wisdom. But the young are always for reform: it strikes in with their vanity to think that that which is old requires mending,—houses, customs, manners—ay, even men: but we can bear with this. Of course, he is not a milksop or a niggard, or you would not like him: otherwise, I half suspect I should think him scanty with the wine-cup. Perhaps he cannot bear much, being unaccustomed to any."

"I dare say he could," replied the squire a little warmly, yet not meeting his friend's look; "but he makes it a point of morality."

"Oh, a puritan! Too fine a fellow to be that. We must laugh him out of his fancies, and make him one of us."

"I don't know about that," observed the squire rather gravely, but in some embarrassment. "He brought good arguments, and out of the Bible too. Indeed, I am beginning to think it would be as well if some of us did not drink quite as much. As he says, 'What is the use of reason if—'"

"Oh! then I was right; and he does lecture even you," interrupted the laughing Durnsford. "I hope he has not quite lectured you into becoming a puritan. Remember, the puritans overturned church and state—murdered the king—and made an arch hypocrite, the son of a brewer, protector! Oh, Philip Conyers! I thought you had been a loyal man—stanch to church and king. I shall be off, lest he should lecture me too into rebellion and puritanism."

"I am no puritan; I am for church and king. Who says otherwise?" shouted the squire with a sudden burst of wrath.

"Not Richard Durnsford: I was but in jest. You would neither overturn the state, nor stint a friend; so we may still drink a glass together without rebuke."

"I am no drunkard," remarked the squire, doggedly.

"Who could make such a charge? I spoke but in mer-

riment. Though the young man did say that some of the customs of our forefathers were wicked and barbarous, he could not mean that we were to taste no wine, and forget our hospitality. A favourite of yours could mean no such thing; or if he did, of course he could not rule you to the same saving opinion: it might be a plausible excuse for him who has nothing.—How admirably he rides! And how the lovely Mabel has improved! I am proud of my pupil."

"I suspect Edward will not yield you the honour: he has taken great pains, and she has improved so much under his instruction that she will mount almost any horse now, with him by her side. And how well the hat and habit become her!" added the proud parent, catching a glimpse of her lovely face as she turned with unusual animation towards her companion.

"She is indeed a lovely creature; and you are a happy fellow, Conyers, to have such a daughter. I suppose I must divide the merit with the young man: I can afford to yield him a little. How beautifully, I may say, Miss Conyers behaves to him!—with such gentle consideration lest he should hold himself slighted,—for those of doubtful stations are sometimes touchy,—and yet restraining his admiration from presumption. There are very few so young who could be so trusted; for the youth is handsome and agreeable. Some who do not know her might deem it imprudent; but she will never forget that she is a Conyers in the bestowing of her love. What were you beginning to tell me about a thunder storm?"

The squire told the story, but not with his usual clearness, for he was a little bewildered by the late conversation, and showed symptoms of being uneasy and fidgety.

"What a providential escape! It makes one shudder to think what might have been her fate. One so young! so gentle! and so lovely! It is fearful to imagine that she might have been lost to us in the splendour of her loveliness. What do not all her friends owe to that young man for his promptness and decision! I told you I was sure he was possessed of both, though based it may be on a little youthful presumption:—but I shall never think of that again; he may lecture me, or my forefathers either, for the future, an he please—nay, stint me in my wine too without a murmur.

There are some, in his situation, who might have hesitated to take the daughter of Philip Conyers in his arms, even to preserve her life; but his is too bold a spirit to be deterred by what he would consider a trifling propriety; and, of course, Miss Conyers, taking the urgency of the occasion into account, showed no resentment at the liberty. I envy him the opportunity of saving her—all must.—Was the storm so very sudden? I should have thought that, if not absorbed in some peculiarly interesting occupation, he might have foreseen the coming danger. I can understand no one but a lover playing the pleasant to his lady-love being so blind."

"Edward was not playing the pleasant to his lady-love, but riding quietly by Mabel's side; and the fault was mine. I told them that there would be no storm for hours; and it did come on very suddenly at last," replied the honest squire.

"Oh, Philip!—just like you!—never will see a cloud or foresee a storm! I verily believe that one might run off with the lovely Mabel before your face, and you not guess the truth. You always want Richard Durnsford at your elbow to read the signs of futurity; you neither see those signs, nor could understand them if you did."

"I see more than people think," replied the squire, rather pettishly; for he piqued himself on that in which he was most deficient, and could never bear a suspicion of his penetration.

"Do you? I doubt it!" said his friend with an incredulous shake of the head. "Well for you that Richard Durnsford is going to settle near you! Good and honourable yourself, you never think it possible that others are not the same, and never suspected any body in your life higher than a poacher or a gipsy. Thunder-storms are not pleasant things. I am vexed at the death of that beautiful mare—I was so convinced that it would suit your daughter. If the young man had not been so absent or absorbed, (for I can scarcely think him stupid,) and sought shelter a few minutes sooner, she would have been saved; but the great loss is yours, so I must not grumble, and fifty guineas is nothing to you: besides, your daughter was saved, though at the last moment and at the expense of a tolerable fright. I wonder she ever mounted again."

"I feared that, and doubt if any one except Edward could

have persuaded her: but he walked by her side for some days; and she knows that he has always an eye upon her horse, and is ready to assist her should she require his aid."

"A gallant youth, upon my word! He rules all, I see; and I must look to my old footing in the family. At Astell Court, I think you said, they sheltered;—was its owner at home?"

"Yes, at the window—saw the accident, and came out immediately, insisting on their entering the house and making use of his carriage."

"Indeed! Well, I am glad of that: enmities should die away with years,—man is mortal, and hate should be the same. He must have felt a little awkward, those who injure being usually the last to forgive. But perhaps he thought it some little reparation for the ungracious things he said of you soon after your marriage;—or perhaps he fears that you may try to open another right of way; they say there is one which might be tried. It must have annoyed you, your daughter's being obliged to him for shelter. A pity but that, foreseeing the storm, Mr. Elton had induced her to ride faster; she might then have reached the farmhouse on the other side of the park: not that you need trouble about it, being the injured party. Did he mention you, or refer to the past?"

"He sent a civil message, with a request that Mabel would sometimes call upon him."

"With an apology, of course, for his former conduct.—I am glad that he sees it at last in its true light: better late than never. You accepted the apology, I suppose, and let your daughter go there once for form's sake?"

"He sent no apology; and I have been thinking lately, whether I might not have been something to blame. One sees things differently on a sick-bed, with death in view, to what one does in the hunting-field; with health and strength in every limb."

"Yes, yes:—one has the blue-devils hovering round one, pinching here and twitching there,—crying 'this for that sin,' and 'that for the other,'—till one hides one's head under the clothes, thinking oneself an enormous sinner, and expecting to be carried off by some hideous grinning demon to the lower regions. But once out in the field again with a spirited horse beneath one—the cry of the hounds and the

blithe bugle sounding in one's ears, and the blue-devils depart, knowing their rule is over. And who can stand up and say that he is an honest man if Philip Conyers cannot? Who can bring a charge against the Squire of Ranford? Does he oppress the poor? Does he drive even the beggar away without a meal? Does he close his doors against his friends? Does he approve of sedition and democracy? Does he not uphold the ancient institutions of his country just as they were in the times of his fathers, against the brawlers who see faults where their ancestors saw only perfection? Did he ever turn down his glass at the toast of 'Church and King'? Is there a breath upon his honour,—a scandal on his name! Is he not the kindest, the most unsuspicious? Who has a better heart—a freer hand?—No, no, Philip Conyers, cast away these idle fancies, the phantoms of a sick-room; they are not fit for a man in health. I would that I could give as good an account of myself; and there are many others who wish the same.—You vindictive!—you were never vindictive in your life—too forgiving by half."

"Our best deeds are imperfect," began the squire, perplexed, embarrassed, yet gratified by his friend's glowing eulogium, though lately awakened thought made him doubt the soundness of his views.

Richard Durnsford knew the great advantage which his quickness gave him over his slower friend. Like a squirrel confusing the sight by the celerity of his change of position, glancing from subject to subject, he confounded the judgment: yet was this glancing so gay, so brilliant, as to pass not from the mind as only idle words;—he seldom failed to leave those impressions—to induce those feelings, which he desired. The heart pondered on his words long after the sounds had died away; and the mind dwelt on images it had little share in forming, though never doubting that its own powers had originated them.

"Yes; our best deeds are imperfect, as you say," interrupting the squire: "but give me your good works, and I will take my chance. God knows that we are all poor imperfect creatures, and pardons our imperfections. You are not afflicted with puritanism, or I should be off, holding the disease infectious. Better have the scarlet fever or the smallpox. But you are not to be led away by new-fangled notions; you do as your father did before you. And where

can you show better men than they were? Well if we turn out half as good, with our French notions, and fashions, and weak, washy wines, and what not. For my part, I am content to do as they did before I was born. I see how it is: you have been kept low since your fall, and are horribly hipped. Some good gallops, and a few visits to the old friends you have known from your boyhood, with a social evening or two, will set you to rights again. By the by, your friends say you would not let them in when they called; and that they understand you mean to give up hunting, keep no wine in your cellar, and build a methodist chapel. I was vexed at the reports, though knowing their folly, and asked how any one could suppose such things of Philip Conyers? You may well laugh. I wonder who set the report about: it appeared to come from one who knew something of your family, for they mentioned Mr. Elton, and said that you had been getting low and fanciful almost from the time of his coming into the house. I positively denied that so young a man—a mere boy—could have any influence over you, and laid the blame on Horton, for keeping you low. Now that you can appear among your friends again, you will soon prove the falsehood of the report. You shall go with me tomorrow to see Barrett. Some of the hounds have the dis temper, some of the servants the scarlet fever, so he has removed to Tillwell Farm, whilst house and kennel are purifying and painting. That is but three miles off, or less, I think, by the footway. I am glad of it; in my opinion, there is scarcely a grander sight than a fine pack of hounds—and his are capital. I shall be over there often; and I wish you would go too, and occasionally give him some hints for their management: he would attend to you, and the whole hunt would have cause to thank you.—Did Astell refer to the past, and his reported wish to supplant you with your wife when Miss Duncombe?"

"He owned to Mabel that he had once loved her mother, and that he loved her now for her mother's sake."

"Did you say that she had been there since?"

"She went once, but did not see him, as he had gone to town the day before on important business."

"What did your daughter and Mr. Elton think of him? Does he appear much altered from their account?"

"They were amazingly taken with him: and the favoura-

ble impression was mutual, I conclude, for he desired Edward, should he require the assistance of a friend, to call boldly upon him. He seemed much struck with the young man's likeness to some old friend, and took to him on that account:—he strikes me sometimes as resembling one known and regarded in my younger days, for he never appeared a stranger to me; but I suppose it must be fancy, for I cannot make out who he is like."

"I don't know that—I will look at him particularly," remarked Mr. Durnsford;—exclaiming, after a few minutes' observation, "I have found the likeness,—Hather!—you remember him?"

"What! the smooth-tongued fellow, who talked so well, and cheated all who had any dealing with him, even his own father? No, no, Durnsford, there is no likeness between him and Edward Elton in any way."

"Well, I may be mistaken; but it seems to me there is,—not exactly now, when he is animated and doing his best to be agreeable, but sometimes when his features are in repose, as the painters say—not lit up with the transitory expression of the moment, but wearing their usual character. You remember being taken in by honest Hather, as he was called, and so do not like to think it. Look at him keenly some time, when he is not trying to please, and then you will admit the resemblance; unless you have forgotten the rogue's features, which is possible, as you never remember a face. You have a shocking memory on such points: I should not be surprised if you were to forget Martha Wilford's physiognomy, singular as it is, should she absent herself from your presence for one short year. How is the black dame, as the urchins call her? She was a fine girl once. How does she wear? I did not see her when last at the Grange."

"Very badly,—looking as though she had lived years during the last few months."

"Does she visit the Grange now?

"No; she has taken an oath not to sit down beneath its roof till Philip's return, appearing to hold me accountable for all his acts."

"Do you visit her, then, that you can give an account of her looks?"

"Not I indeed!—though she sent word by the young peo-

ple, that if I would go, she would tell my fortune, as she had done theirs. But this was no inducement; for Mabel was not herself all the evening; and even Edward looked strange, and only spoke when spoken to."

"Ha! ha! ha! It served them right for going; she is not a woman to be mocked, and I suppose she told them some horrible doom. What did she predict?"

"I know nothing about it; for she sent her commands to me not to inquire on pain of her wrath, and I never took the trouble to ask farther."

"She fairly frightened them, I suppose; and they never again ventured near her unasked."

"They did not go then unasked. She met me in the lane, and bade me send Mabel and Edward to her cottage: you know how she issues her commands."

"So she invited, or commanded their presence—and for the purpose of telling their fortunes too!—Unheard-of courtesy! I shall be jealous, having been the older acquaintance. The fair Mabel I might account for; but young Elton—a perfect stranger—that is extraordinary, considering her usual habits."

"He saved her cat from the dogs, or some such thing."

"So Martha Wilford was grateful for the saving a cat! But how came she, then, to predict so sad a fate as to disturb the youth's equanimity? One would have thought that she might have shown a friendly feeling for once, and predicted a golden destiny."

"He considered that she did entertain a friendly feeling towards him, and said his fortune was rather strange than evil."

"A friend of Martha Wilford's, is he? that is an honour no honest man would envy him. Has he seen her frequently since?"

"This was but a day or two ago, and I doubt if he has any wish to see her again."

"There then, at least, we are agreed. But here am I, talking over old friends and by-gone times with you, forgetting your lovely daughter may think me remiss; I must do my best to make amends."

The next minute he was beside Mabel, exerting all his powers to amuse her, maintaining such a lively and unslackening conversation, till they returned to the house,

that Edward had little opportunity of speaking, had he been so little entertained as to desire it. So well did he succeed in interesting both, that the silence of the squire passed unnoticed, as well as his annoyance and embarrassment.

"Is the world changed since my father's youthful days?" thought Edward Elton as he dressed for dinner. "The unceasing burden of his tale was deceit and wrong,—the coldness of the many—the falsehood of the few—the contempt of all for poverty—the impossibility of winning even the semblance of regard without the aid of wealth or title. I have neither; yet I have seen not the semblance merely, but the reality. I have encountered neither coldness nor deceit. Do not some see as through a darkened glass, robbing life of its beauty by their own gloomy anticipations, and clouding the sun that would else shine brightly on them? Mr. Conyers, does he not feel for me as a son? And Mabel—the gentle, the lovely Mabel—doth she think of me only as a stranger? Did not her blushing cheek speak more than friendship, when the dark dame warned her not to waver? Did she not still hang upon my arm when that woman's words had told her of my feelings? Yes, I must not disclose my love,—not give those feelings speech,—not tell my wishes to her father,—so that woman warned; and if she know but half as much of the future as she told me of the past, I may trust her words. I would it had been otherwise; but, for a few days, she shall be obeyed. I hate concealment; and if I tell not my love in words to the father, I tell it not to the daughter; and for my manner, it shall be alike in his presence or his absence. He must have seen; if not, he may. She spoke of some one who would seek my harm—of coldness from my host. I fear no stranger, and no coldness. There are, who count a breeze a hurricane—a summer's cloud the prelude of a winter's storm; I am not one of these; let me but win Mabel's love, I fear for nothing."

Thus thought Edward Elton; and he descended to the drawing-room with a light step and a lighter heart.

Mr. Durnsford's wit and vivacity were so fascinating, that the gentlemen lingered in the dining-room long after Mabel had left it; and the wine went freely round—more freely than Edward wished, though the faculties of neither were obscured. The young man would have left the table be-

fore, but Mr. Conyers forbade it rather pettishly. Mabel waited long for her evening walk, and did not find it as pleasant as usual. Mr. Durnsford was lively and amusing as ever, but she did not find the walk agreeable;—why, she either did not ask herself, or did not answer.

Edward was of the same opinion, and perhaps pursued the same plan, of not asking or not answering; and Mr. Conyers would have agreed with them, had notes been compared. If Mr. Durnsford found it pleasant, as he appeared to do, he must either not have seen the discomfort of the others, though a babe might have guessed it, or he must have found pleasure in the circumstance. What could have made this walk less agreeable than those of the lately preceding evenings? It did not rain—it was not chilly—it was not oppressive. The path was not sufficiently broad to allow more than two to walk abreast. Mr. Durnsford had kept in the advance with Mabel the whole time; and her answers and observations were not always appropriate to the questions and observations of her animated companion, though he appeared not to remark it. Edward walked behind with the squire, who, strange to say, was restless and out of humour; detaining the young man beside him, though neither wishing to entertain nor be entertained; and occasionally giving him a flat contradiction, or making a point of disagreeing with him, as if to prove that he had, and would have, opinions of his own.

I hate dulness or ill-humour in myself or others; so will, with the reader's permission, break up the party, wishing all a good night and a better morning. No use arguing with those who are in a froward mood without knowing why—no removing grievances that the tongue is ashamed to tell. To-morrow's sun may rise in glory and dispel all mists; if not, let us to our pouting rooms, venting our ill-humour on ourselves alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE rose-coloured hues of life had somewhat faded in Edward's mind before he sank to sleep. At dinner he had imagined none of those crosses to his views which the dark dame had predicted; at tea he was less exulting, and began to think it possible that storm-clouds might arise on his fair horizon. If he thought so then, still more did he think so when, in little more than a fortnight, without being able to fix on any act of his as the cause, or on any precise time as the period from which the change had commenced, he found that his position in the squire's family was no longer what it had been. His pleasure was no longer so kindly or so eagerly consulted; his society was no longer so much delighted in, though assiduously sought, or rather required; and his opinion was no longer solicited, or no longer heeded. His wishes no longer ruled the squire, who, though still the hospitable host, and at times showing his former regard, was evidently capricious in his favour, and still more evidently ill at ease with himself or with those around him. His little ebullitions of temper became every day more frequent; even Mabel suffered occasionally, and Mr. Durnsford did not always escape; whilst Edward was often pained by pettish remarks on the presumption of youth, in despising the wisdom of the aged, and the customs of their fathers, and expecting to rule their elders.

Naturally of a good temper, and really attached to Mr. Conyers, Edward submitted to these remarks in patient silence, or turned them off by a gay yet respectful reply,

though he could not but feel hurt by their frequent recurrence.

The domestics began to take their cue from their master, and, urged by Dawkins, who had never forgiven his interference with Fury, or to screen their own delinquencies, hinted that he was inclined to lord it over them, giving, at times, orders contrary to those issued by Mr. Conyers himself. This, which the squire might have known from examination, and should have suspected without inquiry, to be incorrect, ruffled his temper far more than was needful; but the squire of that day was not the squire of three weeks before.

Annoyed by the reports mentioned by Durnsford, Mr. Conyers, to prove that he was neither niggard nor methodist, began, on the succeeding day, a round of visits to his hunting friends, attributing their apparent neglect to the belief that their presence would not be acceptable; and, to silence those same reports, every invitation to dinner was readily accepted, and various banquets given in return, at both of which his child and his young friend beheld, with deep regret, that the habits of his former days were regaining their ascendancy, and the better feelings of the sick-room fading away. The oaths in which most of his companions indulged were listened to as words of course; and the wine-cup circled as of old, till man's boasted reason was quenched in the stolidity or delirium of inebriety.

That the squire by no means felt satisfied with himself whilst yielding to the influence of former habits and riotous companions, was evident from his shrinking from the look of Edward and his child, when the effects of his excess had passed: but the good resolutions sometimes formed were too often swept away by persuasion or ridicule.

Brought up in frugality, and with a horror of intemperance, of which his father had too often witnessed the fatal results to mind and body, Edward was shocked and disgusted at many of the scenes of which he was compelled to become a spectator. He would have declined these parties, so little in accordance with his tastes and principles; but Mr. Conyers was peremptory in insisting on his accompanying himself and Durnsford; and after claiming as a right to decline wine when he pleased, he thought it better to comply, in the hope of regaining his influence over the squire, and, after a

while, turning him awry from habits so hurtful to himself, in body and in soul. The right was admitted, but a smile passed between Mr. Durnsford and his host, thinking how rarely that right would be exercised in opposition to sneers, abuse, and ridicule. They were deceived: Edward Elton was not to be turned by either, when his own heart, as in the present case, did not join with the tempters; and the quiet and conciliating manner in which he declined a participation in their excess often saved him from sneers, and compelled respect, though his firmness won him little liking, and less love: in fact, he was only tolerated by many as the guest of the kind-hearted and hospitable Philip Conyers. This he saw; and though it made no change in his conduct, it ruffled his temper and galled his spirit; the more when he saw himself declining, day by day, in the favour of his still usually kind host, who felt his conduct a rebuke to himself, and sometimes joined in the ridicule of his over-sobriety, as most considered it.

Happily for him, save Mr. Durnsford, there was neither sufficient wit nor talent among the squire's friends to gild excess, or gloss over sin: he saw the drunkard in his natural deformity, and was firm against what he most dreaded—the fear of offending Mabel's father, though Durnsford urged him to be a little less scrupulous on that very plea.

"I admire your principles, Mr. Elton—still more your firmness, considering your youth; but, by a little indulgence, you might acquire greater influence, and thus effect some good, particularly to my friend Conyers: whereas I fear you are sinking in his regard. Come, yield for once to a little friendly advice! What is a glass more or less?—your head could stand it, as mine does: I always know what I am about. The squire would hold you in much higher favour; and, by pleasing him in this, you might hereafter gain him to your wishes. You are too prudent not to see the necessity of sometimes bending if you would rise; and the wisdom of acquiescing—nay, joining people in their little foibles. Humour folks in their ways, and they will let you take yours. What if they do go wrong?—it is nothing to you—you are not called on to set them right."

"You do not understand me, Mr. Durnsford," replied the young man, indignantly. "I prize Mr. Conyers's favour highly—most highly; but I trust that I shall never stoop to

falsify my principles, or countenance what my heart condemns, to maintain that regard or accomplish my wishes. My hopes and my views are open to all: if I succeed, it shall be by honourable means—not by bending to deceit, or stooping to flatter wrong by word or deed."

"As you please; I only sought your good," said Mr. Durnsford, shrugging his shoulders. "I see my mistake now. As you allow Mr. Conyers to be cheated by his servants without opening his eyes, and do not exert the influence you possess to lead him to your own sobriety, I thought you had seen the policy of silence, and kept your own head clear to profit hereafter by the confusion of his intellects."

"The policy of silence, Mr. Durnsford? I do not comprehend you. There is a great difference, I should imagine, between forcing opinions and rebukes on one older than myself, when hopeless of effecting good, and encouraging error by joining in it, or keeping silence from interest when required by regard to speak. I have more than once mentioned the dishonesty of his servants to Mr. Conyers."

"I was not aware of that, but rather understood that he considered them honest because you had seen nothing to the contrary. His opinion of your judgment is so high, that you have but to speak out plainly, and he yields at once."

I do not find Mr. Conyers so yielding, and believe that your influence is paramount to mine," replied the young man coldly, turning away without perceiving the approach of the squire.

"What was Edward saying?" he inquired.

"Only regretting that he could not influence you more; being a little jealous, I believe, of your regard for me."

"Influence me in what?" asked the squire, quickly.

"The old story!—to be as over-scrupulous as himself. The young always think they have discovered the exact rule of right. I admire his firmness, and hope it will not degenerate into obstinacy, to which, I fear, it is fast approaching. You should speak to him on the subject; though I doubt if he would receive the advice in good part. He is a fine young man, in spite of his self-opinion: though I think it would be better if he gave way a little on some points. But it must be flattering—in fact, intoxicating, to one who has seen so little of the world, and holds no high station in

it, to appear thus to rebuke, and be superior to, those older and wiser than himself."

"Better if he learnt a little humility, instead of reproofing and wishing to rule his elders," observed the squire, testily. "Yet his manner to me has ever been affectionate and respectful as that of a son," he added, reluctantly.

"He may have reasons for that; he is no fool."

"What reasons?" inquired Mr. Conyers, sharply. "Edward Elton is no time-server, though he may be a little too stiff; and, perhaps, it would be as well if I and others thought seriously on many things—more as he wishes that I should think."

"I leave all to judge for themselves:—a cup of wine and a merry song may be deadly sins, though our fathers did not think so; but I am not inclined to play niggard or puritan," replied Mr. Durnsford, with a slight curling of the lip that made his old friend turn away with a troubled look.

The plain good sense of Mr. Conyers, warped by his blind devotion to the habits and opinions of his ancestors, however erring, did not fit him to cope in argument with Mr. Durnsford, or to strip a question of the extraneus matter with which his liveliness clothed it, bewildering those of slower perceptions, till the bare question of right and wrong was wreathed and smothered with bright fancies, or the judgment fettered in the bonds of prejudice. Ill at ease with himself; his mind, the arena for contending feelings; shrinking from ridicule, though professing to despise it; and ruled by an appeal to his prejudices, whilst believing he had none;—the squire's manner was variable and uncertain, according to the society in which he chanced to be at the moment. Yielding to the fear inspired by those bugbear words, niggard and puritan, and honouring the customs of his fathers, he hastened to defend himself from the charge of seeing sin in the wine-cup or the song, with a confusion of ideas which rendered it difficult to gather a meaning from his bewildered speech.

"You need not make a defence, as if I had charged you with being a milksop or a miser; who that knows Philip Conyers would believe the tale?" said Durnsford, interrupting him, with a friendly smile. "As for the real habitual drunkard, you and I have as great a detestation of the man

as young Elton himself: though we may not indulge in such high-flown speeches. I am particular in employing sober tradesmen,—and so are you, I know,—and will not permit a public-house in Ransford: but it is rather different, a party of gentlemen meeting together after a hard day's sport, and making a little merry; they can afford it—they have no business that can be hindered—and injure no one by being a little excited. There cannot be much harm in that—not even if they should require a little aid to get up stairs. One cannot be always playing the wise man; the mind needs relaxation."

"To be sure," said the squire, trying to feel assured of the truth of that to which he assented.

"Now, Mr. Elton will not agree to this self-evident fact, and makes allowances for no one; so Barrett and some others talk of having a set-to at him to-night, though I warned them that they had better not; for I suspect the youth can be violent, and declined having any hand in it. And now, Philip, before I go to dress, when will you and the lovely Mabel honour me with your company at Newton Marsh? Miss Marsden will be able to meet you there in a few days, her cousin being so much better; and you and your daughter liked her, I think. I was much obliged to you for asking her here the last fortnight; it was so kind of you, because she was my hundred and fiftieth cousin, and was so afraid of catching the small pox from her friend's little boy. Though hurried away so suddenly yesterday even, she bade me thank you a thousand times for your kindness."

"I am always glad to oblige such an old friend as you, Durnsford, and should rather thank you for proposing it as you did. Mabel would have felt lonely else when we were out; and, I don't know how it is, but we have been out a great deal lately,—or perhaps I think so from the contrast. She was a pleasant woman, though no longer young."

"Do not deny the kindness of having invited her here, for the proposition was your own, though I readily and thankfully accepted the offer. But when do you honour my poor cottage with your presence?"

"You shall settle that with Mabel and Edward."

"With Mr. Elton? I understood that he said his visit had been so long, he must depart immediately."

"Has he found the visit so very long?"

"I think Miss Marsden said so. Of course, if with you then, I shall be very happy to receive him as your friend,—that is, if he will put up with a bed at a farm-house near, for I have none to offer him under my own roof. I will try and have it comfortable; for though I dare say he has slept a hundred times in a garret, or worse, I think it possible that he may be a little touchy on the point: those of no station are always more sensitive than those of assured footing in society. Since you leave it to me and your daughter, I shall take care and name an early day."

"With all my heart."

"When do you pay your legacy into Tremlett's bank? I want you to settle a little business for me there."

"I have not received the legacy yet."

"I know that; but you go to Wexton the day after tomorrow to receive it from Mr. Stanton,—do you not?"

"So he writes me word."

"A thousand pounds from a man who only saw you once! just because your name was the same as his! It is a thousand, is it not?"

"More or less. A certain sealed box, containing guineas that he had hoarded up and kept packed in the smallest compass, from some strange fancy of having to fly for his life from fire or robbers, besides jewels and Bank of England notes; for he never would trust a country bank. The exact value of the legacy is not known."

"Truly you are a fortunate man! It is well for Tremlett that you have not the same dread of country banks, though several have failed lately; and there were strange reports of Tremlett himself a little time ago."

"Who told you that I had no dread of country banks? I once lost some hundreds by them, and my uncle some thousands—so I never trust them now: besides, young Tremlett dashes away too much to please me. No, no! once let me get guineas or Bank of England notes into my hands, and I engage that no country banker shall have a sight of them."

"Ay, I lost three hundred myself once by Hinton's breaking, just at the moment, too, when I most wanted the money. You remember Hinton? Every one supposed him rolling in riches; and he was cried up as the most honourable of men. 'I would as soon trust him as the Bank

of England itself,' said one. 'I think he is safer still,' cried another. No one thought he could fail; so, fool that I was! I placed my money in his hands. He broke within three weeks; and after ten years the last dividend was paid, and I was poorer by two hundred pounds!—I have seldom much money in my possession to care about; only what I have, I keep in my own charge. But I did not know that you disliked country banks as much as I do; and yours is rather a large sum to keep in the house. You will be robbed and murdered, as the gipsy once predicted."

"Yes, and tried to bring it to pass, too, I believe," replied the squire with a careless laugh.

"I advise you seriously to take care, however you may be inclined to laugh. You do not mind being called coward by all the jesters in the county, though they doubled the present number."

"I am not afraid! Philip Conyers is no coward to shake at a whistle or whimper at a pistol, and look into rats' holes and drawers lest a thief should be there. He is not afraid to meet any one man—nor, for the matter of that, any two either:—he is not so old but he could show them sport yet. There are not many who would venture to attack him—and certainly not his house, with all that set of lazy fellows about, who would fight were it only for the sake of their own dinners. Besides, I have a secret place which no one suspects: I will show it you one of these days. You know the old cabinet in my dressing room? The top lets down; and inside are some rather ruinous-looking pigeon-holes, stuffed with odd papers, old bills, and other things as valuable: let them take them if they like. In the third hole on the right hand, at the back of a parcel of papers crammed carelessly in, is a secret drawer: this is my treasure-box! No one only feeling would discover it; but press a finger hard on each side of the division, about three inches from the bottom, and a drawer bursts out. There is no one would find it, or think of looking there—at least, none of my lazy fellows; though I rather suspect some of them have seen the inside of the cabinet, for I seldom lock it, that they may not fancy that there is any thing of value kept there."

"Hush!" said Durnsford, advancing cautiously to look over a low wall near which they were conversing.

"What is the matter?" asked the squire.

"Nothing, I hope," replied his friend in a low voice; "only I fancied that I heard a rustling as of some person stealing away, who might have overheard our conversation; but I suppose I must have been mistaken, for I can see no one."

"And a listener could not have got away so quickly but you must have seen him," remarked Mr. Conyers, quite convinced that he had not been overheard.

"You had better not mention the subject again," observed Durnsford, "for there are gipsies about, who start up suddenly one knows not why or whence; but here, out in this open space, there is no possibility of our being overheard. What does Stanton say is the amount of your legacy?"

"He does not know exactly; though it is supposed to be more than a thousand. The box is to be placed in my hands unopened."

"I hope, Conyers, that they will not set aside the will on the plea of insanity."

"My good friend was rather eccentric, certainly, to say the least."

"Not a little so, it appears. How do you manage about the dinner at Merrick's? Is not it the same day on which you are to receive the legacy from Stanton?"

"Yes; I call on him in my way;—it will not be many miles out of my road to Merrick's."

"And take the treasure with you?—To be sure, you sleep at Merrick's."

"No; but, as the road is bad at night, I shall leave early."

"Early! what do you call early?" asked his friend with a smile.

"About nine: it will be scarcely dark then, and I and Jumper know the road well."

"But you will have young Elton with you, and a servant?"

"Neither. Edward is not invited; and what with turning out to grass, and lameness, I have no spare horse: and you know I never want a servant tagging after me."

"But, with all that money about you!"

"Who will know it?"

"Do not trust to that; and it is only Sanson, and one or two others, who say that a man must be a coward, or have an evil conscience, to be afraid to ride alone by night."

"With two good pistols, without which I never ride alone at night, I am afraid of no one."

"Not this famous highwayman about whom people rave? I hear he has stopped several, and boasts that no gentleman is bold enough to ride alone at night for fear of him,—yet he is but one, and would scorn to take an advantage."

"Says he so? A fine bold fellow!" replied the squire,— "only he lies! I am not afraid to ride alone; no,—nor to meet him either."

"Nay, this is bravado, Conyers. No one who knows you doubts your courage; and you would not heed the sneers of strangers, nor the braggart boasts of a highwayman? Never mind what the fellow may say, but take a servant."

"I am resolved,—so say no more on the subject. The fellow shall not boast of frightening Philip Conyers;—timidity or cowardice will but increase his daring. Let him come!—he will find his match."

"Mabel's pleadings will change your mind, and furnish an unimpeachable excuse for taking an attendant."

"If you regard me, Durnsford, Mabel will know nothing of this," said the squire, sternly. "I am no bragging schoolboy, to be shamed or changed by a woman's tears. I tell you the fellow will not dare to attack me:—but, remember! hint a word to Mabel, and our friendship of so many years is at an end."

"You are making this too serious, Philip, and looking as proud as your proud ancestor who bearded one of the Henrys in his own hall, I forget for what. Come, come, you must make some allowance for the anxiety of friendship."

"Prove that friendship, then, by engaging not to say another word on this subject to me or others."

"If you insist."

"I do insist," replied the squire, warmly.

"Then I submit. I admire your bravery:—it is what few would dare with such a sum,—many without. You ought to be knighted, like your other ancestor Sir Edward, for keeping a whole army at bay in a narrow pass."

"You dine at Merrick's, don't you?" asked the squire, pacified by his promised silence, and flattered by the eulogium on his bravery.

"I am very sorry that it is not in my power; but you saw the letter from Turnbull, appointing me to meet him many

miles the contrary way. I told Merrick he ought to have fixed some other day. It is provoking;—for I understand several of the best masters of hounds in the kingdom will be present, whom I particularly wished to meet. But, heyday! it is nearly time we were off to Barrett's if we intend to walk; and I am not dressed." And away went Mr. Durnsford to adorn.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Are you ill, Mr. Elton?" asked Mabel, softly, as he stood at the window, waiting for the squire and Mr. Durnsford. The young man turned abruptly, and met the inquiring look of the gentle girl, who had advanced timidly towards him, and was expecting his reply.

"And if I were ill, what would it matter?—you would not grieve."

"Not grieve?"
"Would you?" he inquired eagerly, advancing to where she stood, and gazing earnestly upon her.

"How could you think that I should not?"
For a moment longer he gazed on her with delight, then demanded hastily,

"Why call me Mr. Elton, when your father bade you be less formal and call me Edward?"

"She hesitated an instant, and then said, "You have not been the same the last few days: or I fancied so."

"And have I only changed, Miss Conyers? Do we stand in the same position to each other as we stood, not three weeks since? Have your feelings undergone no alteration? You are silent, and turn away. How have I deserved this change?"

"I did not say that I had changed."
"Will you assert that you have not?"
"Most certainly."

"Will you say that you esteem me now, as when we went to Martha Wilford's cottage?"

"Indeed I do!"

"I will not,—I cannot doubt you;—yet days have passed since I have found a place beside you—since we have spoken of our thoughts and feelings:—another has been ever near you—another has engaged your attention."

"Mr. Durnsford does talk a great deal, and would sit down beside me," she replied, so simply, that he feared no more, yet, lover-like, sought farther assurance.

"It was not your choice, then?"

"No: I found him wearying sometimes."

"But why call me Mr. Elton so coldly and so formally?"

"Mr. Durnsford and Miss Marsden hinted at the propriety of my so doing,"—blushing more deeply as she spoke.

"Ha! Is it so? I thought as much."

"Thought what?" asked Mabel in surprise.

"That Durnsford is my enemy."

"You wrong him!—he ever speaks most highly of you." He looked incredulous.

"Then why induce you to a display of coldness."

"Not coldness: he would not—I would not."

"You would not have acquiesced had he required coldness?" asked Edward eagerly as she paused and hesitated.

"No—I would never give you pain!"

"Thank you!—thank you! Then you will call me Edward as before? I have your father's sanction."

"You call me Miss Conyers."

"I will call you so no more, but Mabel now,—hereafter, I will hope, my own dear Mabel. I will no longer bear suspense."

"Then you are not ill?" said Mabel, softly, taking no notice by her words of his pretensions.

"Quite well now, fair Mabel; you have cured me."

"Then you were ill, or anxious?" I feared your letter pained you—that it brought evil news."

He started, and the brightness of his look was clouded.

"Then it did bring civil news," she said with touching sympathy.

"Yes; but it was—it must have been—founded on misconception. Your father"—he stopped abruptly.

"—Will do any thing to serve you," said his daughter, kindly pained at his sudden agitation.

"Your father serve? Mabel, tell me, and tell me

truly, why has your father changed towards me within the last few days?"

"Changed? I have seen no change."—He could not doubt the sincerity of her surprise at the supposition; but that was little consolation.

"Could I have fancied?—But no—what you have failed to see, I have felt. The coldness of which Martha Wilford spoke has surely come; and it bears date from Mr. Durnsford's first arrival:—he is no friend of mine. It is he who leads Mr. Conyers into those scenes which he so lately condemned—who ever seeks to give to my avoidance of excess the appearance of a harsh rebuke to others, and all with the semblance of simplicity or friendship. It is he has done me wrong with your kind father.—But I will bear no more. I——"

"Hush! hush! for pity, hush! Do not think my father regards you less; do not judge thus of Mr. Durnsford: and, oh! do not look so fiercely!"

"Fiercely upon you, Mabel? Never! never! Still this alarm!—you tremble! What would you have me do?"

"Be calm and patient. I have seen no coldness; and Nurse Wilford warned you against——"

"—My own fiery temper," said the young man, concluding her sentence.

"Yes!" she replied with a smile so confiding, it should have stilled the most outrageous fury.

"I will be calm and gentle—all you wish, sweet Mabel. But must I bear your father's coldness without question? and Durnsford's malice without mention?"

"Coldness! and malice! You said that I was cold but lately—yet you do not think so now."

"No, not now; but they are not like you."

"Oh, no! not half so simple.—Hark! they are calling you. Good-b'ye! but premise first that you will be calm and gentle—so good, so very good!" holding up her finger in playful admonition.

"I will try, sweet Mabel, to be like yourself; what more can you desire? And you—you will not change?—you will not judge me harshly, nor think evil of me, let others say the worst they may?"

"Never! Now go."

"Yes, with a lighter heart, but not with pleasure. I dis-

like Sir Thomas Barrett and his usual guests; but I will strive to win your praise. What would I not do for such a guerdon!"

He went; and Mabel was left to herself. The work and the music, the pencil and the book, were all laid aside, after a brief trial:—her mind was not with any. There was a deeper flush than usual on her cheek; and her slender fingers guided not the pencil firmly; and, for the music, the hands wandered over the ivory keys scarcely more white, and one tune mingled with another, till, shocked at the discord, she strolled out into the pleasant shrubbery, where the sun glanced through the interwoven branches with a soft and fitful light, whilst the birds filled all the air with their wild minstrelsy. She sat down on a mossy seat under an ancient beech, and the branches played above her with a soft and soothing murmur; the gentle breeze came on her fair brow, fanning her flushed cheek; and the rays of the golden sun, setting in glory in the west, gleamed on and around her, shedding a splendour over her gentle and touching loveliness. But the sweet music of the birds—the gentle murmur of the breeze among the leafy boughs—the golden glories of the setting sun, were not more sweet, more gentle, or more glorious, than the day-dreams of that young and guileless being.

If that heart had had its troubles, they were all gone now, or they were hushed. The present was before her in its beauty—she dreaded not the future; all around her seemed made up of peace, and joy, and loveliness. Beautiful Mabel! who might not envy thee?—not for thy loveliness, but for thy pure and innocent heart, shedding its radiance over all things. She was in peace and love with all the world;—and she was so happy—oh, so very happy! Must such bright visions fade? May they not linger?—will not the future bring her brighter hues and lovelier visions still? Ask not of the future!—she knew it not, or the dream had ended and the vision fled. What though the rose must fade to-morrow? its beauties are our own to-day. And for the joys of a grateful, humble heart, like the waves of the summer,—

“As one dies away,
Another as bright and as shining comes on.”

It was early when, throwing aside the pencil and the book,

the needle and the music, she sought the greenwood wild ; for the dinner in those days was served at two—that rather late than early ; (we marvel how our grandfathers could dine at such an uncouth hour;) yet there she sat till the trees threw a lengthened shadow, and the dusky twilight gathered round her. What matter for the evening gloom ?—the mind dwells in its own place—the heart lives in its own light !

CHAPTER XV.

TWILIGHT deepened and deepened till it grew into night; yet there she sat at the open window, looking out on the gray vaulted arch above, thickly studded with its golden stars—the lights in the room untrimmed—the night-breeze murmuring round unheeded. A hurried step was on the stairs—she held her breath to listen, and yet she knew whose foot it was without the staying of her breath. The door was thrown hastily open, and as hastily closed;—a quick step advanced to the centre of the apartment, then stopped abruptly;—and there was no motion, and no sound, but the heavy breathing of the intruder. The bloom deepened on Mabel's cheek—the long lashes fell over her downcast eyes; but she neither spoke nor stirred.

"You will not speak to me! You will not welcome me! Even you despise me!"—exclaimed the intruder, passionately.

Mabel looked up, and, by the flickering light of the untrimmed candles, saw Edward Elton gazing on her with a burning eye and contracted brow, over which his hair, disarranged by his speed and the night air, hung in wild disorder; whilst a crimson spot as of wrath or shame was distinctly marked on his clear cheek.

"What has happened?" she asked wildly, starting up and advancing towards him, for his agitation could not pass un-

noticed. "You alone! Where is my father?—my dear kind father?"

"At Sir Thomas Barrett's," he replied in a bitter tone.

"Well?—quite well? Tell me truly!"

"Well!—quite well!—revelling with the revellers—draining the wine-cup to the dregs—proving himself to be a man, by sinking to the level of a brute."

"Thank Heaven!" said Mabel, fervently, replying only to his assurance of her father's safety.

"Certainly, Miss Conyers has cause to be thankful: her father can drink more than most men; and, if overpowered at last, there are many to countenance, more to applaud."

"This from you? I grieve—I had thought—" and Mabel turned away without concluding, for she knew that her voice faltered, and that tears were in her eyes.

The tone of the speaker had been more harsh and sarcastic even than his words.

"You grieve?—and it is I who have made you grieve! Shame on my lips, that could say such bitter words! Forgive me, Mabel. Tears too, and of my causing! What may I do to atone for this cruelty? If you knew—if you could guess—what I have borne for the last few hours, you might forgive me; but you cannot guess—you cannot understand—and you will not pardon!" exclaimed the young man passionately; yet softness mingled with that passion, and his fierce look and tone were gone. "You will not pardon me?" he asked with melancholy earnestness.

"Most willingly!—heed not my tears—you know how they fall for the veriest nothings. It was not for myself—it was what you said of my father,—but you did not—you could not mean to be unkind?—to say harsh things of him?"—looking entreatingly into his flashing eyes.

"I meant not to pain you," he replied evasively."

"But my father—my dear kind father—you may mourn that he should yield to the persuasions of others, but you love him still?—love him as I love him?"

"And if I did, the chance is that he would despise my love," observed the young man bitterly.

"If you did? Surely you do! And why should he despise it?"

"Because—" he began as fiercely as before; then, checking his wrath, he turned abruptly from her, pacing the

room with hurried steps. For some minutes the gentle girl looked upon him in silent fear and sorrow; then, gathering courage, spoke as he approached her in his hurried pacing.

"Is this silence kind? Tell me what has passed? I entreat—I implore you. Any—every thing would be preferable to my fears."

He came close up to her, and, restraining his wrath, spoke with unnatural slowness and distinctness.

"Why seek to know what has occurred? Enough that I must away—I cannot linger—and we two must part."

"Away?—and we must part? Tell me! tell me!" clasping her hands imploringly.

"You said my father was quite well?"

"Quite well," he repeated in the same unnatural tone,

"And Mr. Durnsford?"

"And Mr. Durnsford. He seems a favourite of yours," he added bitterly.

"But you—you are not well!" she said in tones that should have soothed him: but he was in a wayward mood that night—

Wrath in his heart, and fever in his brain."

"Think not of me! If your father and your favourite are quite well, what matter if a friendless stranger should have an aching heart and an aching brow?"

"Do I deserve this, Mr. Elton?" she asked in a voice so low—so soft—so sad, that he could scarcely catch the sound.

"No, Mabel, gentlest! best!—you do not deserve it. But I am not myself to-night. Bear with me! I have been branded as a coward,—taunted as a puritan and hypocrite! Ay, Mabel, and by your father too?—though not as loudly as by some. Is it strange, then, that my brow is as a burning coal, and my cheek red with shame? But look you kindly on me, Mabel, and I shall grow calm. Tell me that you see no shame upon my brow! Let me hear that dear soft voice say that you do not hate me, and I will be gentle as a lamb before you."

"Hate you? I could not, if I would! But tell me more. Your words are fearful—and your eyes gleam out so fiercely that I cannot look upon them."

"Not fiercely upon you, sweet Mabel."

"Not now. Sit down beside me: I must hear all."

"More than enough!—all is unfit for woman's ear," he replied, taking the seat to which she motioned him.

"What can you mean?"

"Listen, and you will learn."

She did listen in fear and trembling.

At first, his words came slow and thick; for, though Mabel guessed it not, he had taken far more than his usual quantity of wine; yet no mental faculty was obscured: on the contrary, his memory appeared endowed with a frightful distinctness, as though each taunting laugh and opprobrious term had been burnt in upon his heart in characters of fire. As he proceeded, his words came quicker, and his voice more distinct—the excitement of the mind mastering the parching of his tongue. It was the first great trial of his life—he was new to suffering and to censure, and he bore it as the prosperous bear a first reverse. His high spirit revolted at the indignities heaped upon him; and he did not stop to ask if his firmness might not have lost some of its merit by a little pride in the showing, or if his temper had been as unruffled as it should have been.

"I went, as you know, reluctantly. I had seen too much of Sir Thomas Barrett, and his usual companions, to feel any inclination for farther intercourse; but your father would have been offended had I not gone. I marked his coolness towards me during our walk; and before we entered the house, I found that he considered me over-scrupulous—too abstemious to be good company. Why, then, had he insisted on my going? I pass over the chilling and formal salutations of some of the guests—the over-warmth of the others. I little heeded either; my thoughts were with you, and with your father—of what I resolved should not be deferred after the next day; for I will not sit at your father's board one moment longer than he bids me welcome,—no! not even to win her I love."

"Mr. Durnsford, in a friendly tone, advised me to drink a little more than usual to please Mr. Conyers, who had spoken on the subject. Fool that I was! I consented: I should have known he was no friend. All was peace till he came, then doubt and care.

"The wine went round—the host was pressing; story

succeeded story,—some such as I should shame to repeat, nay,—even to remember,—and my grave looks told my feelings. I was questioned—taunted—but could not, and would not, conceal my disapproval. ‘Then why here, if you like not our company or our talk?’ asked one. I rose to depart, but, yielding at last to the wishes of Mr. Conyers, the host, and others, retook my seat. Better had I gone then; but some words from Durnsford decided me to stay: they were carelessly spoken, yet I doubt not that they had a meaning. Again the wine went round; the toast and the song succeeded; the punch was made, and stirred with the fox’s pad, and the shouts of the drinkers hailed its appearance. I saw the host nod to one of his guests; I heard whispers, and gathered enough to learn that it was resolved I should not leave the table sober. There being no lady of the house, there was no summons to tea—no excuse to go to the drawing-room. I had already drunk far more than I liked, and felt excited and feverish. There was likely to be cause for offence given; and if I drank more, it was probable that I should take offence too promptly. Of those around me, if not completely intoxicated, few, save Durnsford, were absolutely sober. A toast was given: I declined more wine. The toast referring to no individual, my refusing to drink it should have offended none; and when asked for the reason of my refusal, I frankly stated that I had already drunk more than enough, and, not being used to their drinking parties, could not stand them.

“Some pressed me whose manner was friendly, though I doubt if their meaning was such; but, finding me unmoved, each had a word to taunt and wound. There were doubts thrown out as to my being a gentleman, from my not knowing the uniyersal rule not to refuse a toast, and from my owning no hunter till your father’s present. There were loud taunts as to my sincerity. I was called puritan!—hypocrite!—an insolent reprobate of my elders! My defence was not listened to, for many spoke at once. Finding my temper giving way, for I had with difficulty restrained my indignation, I rose to depart.

“‘Sit down! sit down!’ cried your father and others.

“‘Go!’ whispered Durnsford. It was kind advice. Did he mean it kindly?

" 'Drink the toast!' shouted the host.

" 'Drink the toast!' shouted his followers, still more loudly.

" 'Will you let me go on the instant, and urge me to drink no more, if I do?' I asked.

" 'No, no! drink all the toasts,' shouted many.

" 'Hear me, Sir Thomas Barrett,' I said. 'If you asked me here to do me honour and pleasure, I thank you, and, as my host, you will urge me to do nothing displeasing to myself, or contrary to what I consider as a duty. If you asked me only to furnish yourself sport, to laugh at my scruples, and force me to do what I condemn, I owe you no courtesy, and claim a right to depart. For the doubts and taunts of your guests, I pass them over now, as the ebullitions of bewildered minds; should they repeat them to-morrow, I will answer all.'

"Sir Thomas was silent; but another plainly avowed their views.

" 'It is of no use arguing, young man, for we are not going to put up with your preaching, and let you triumph over us. We are resolved that you shall for once be gloriously drunk, and are not prepared to be balked; so you had better submit in silence. Drink the toast! the bowl of punch as a forfeit for refusal—or salt and water as a punishment! Such are the rules in our parties.'

" 'Never!' I replied indignantly.

" 'Drag him down!' shouted many with fearful oaths, rising tumultuously for the purpose of fulfilling the threat.

" 'Stand back, gentlemen!' I exclaimed. 'I warn you to desist. I will not yield while I have strength or life. Touch me not! or there will be harm to some. Let me depart in peace!'

"As I spoke, I took up my host's sword, which was accidentally lying near, and waving it round, gained an open space before me, whilst I placed my back against the wall, prepared for defence if attacked. They looked from one to the other in surprise at my boldness, and then questioned what was to be done. Mr. Durnsford spoke, professedly as my friend; but, to say the best of his words, they were misunderstood, and only relit the flame. The tumult rose higher than before—the riotous revellers seemed inclined to rush upon me, though half withheld by my bold bearing and

the gleaming sword. Your father spoke. I could not hear his words distinctly; but they had the effect of urging on the maddened band. He advanced towards me with an extended arm, as though his hand would be the first to be laid upon me. 'He spoke to some one near him; but his words were lost in the mingled shouts of 'Force him down!—seize him! make him drink!' Once more I succeeded in clearing a small space before me; but I saw that this could not last. There were many against me. True, I was sober—they were not; but their very inebriety supplied some with a madman's strength. I looked to the door; to force my way thence was impossible—too many had rushed to guard it. There I stood, hemmed in with foes—their eyes gleaming on me, their lips uttering taunting words—all eager to rush upon me, scarcely withheld by the naked weapon in my hand. I had no friend there; your father, he whom I had loved and respected—he too was against me, standing forward in the circle with his arm ready to seize me. 'I was well nigh as mad as those around me; my wild young blood was up—I would not yield; if they dared the struggle, they must abide the consequences.

"They saw that I would not yield—that I would use the weapon in my hand; and there was a momentary pause—the fearful pause which precedes the mortal strife. Mr. Conyers advanced into the open space, which I had hitherto maintained before me. 'Well done! Seize him! seize him!—force him down!' shouted the band. His hand was nearly on my arm—I could pause no longer—I swept the sword—"

"You did not strike my father? In pity, say you did not! You told me he was well!" exclaimed the trembling Mabel.

"I struck him not!—he was your father, Mabel,—and I had sat at his board, and watched by his couch. There is no blood upon my hands—look at them—they may still press yours. Forgive me, that, in my own excitement, I forgot your fears. Be calm! there was no evil done to any."

"Thank Heaven!—Go on—I would hear all."

"But you tremble now."

"Say on!" waving her hand impatiently.

"I have said the door was strongly guarded; but the windows opened on the lawn, and the shutters had not been

closed. I could not strike your father:—I sought the life of none; though, had they laid hands upon me, I would not have answered for my acts. I was young, not trained to feats of agility. Swinging the weapon round with a wider sweep, in the confusion caused by the stepping of those forward back on those behind, I sprang over their heads on the table—dashed out the window with a chair, and vaulting through, was standing on the lawn before those within had comprehended the sudden crash, or the mode of my escape.

"There rose several view-halloos—your father's voice above the rest; with the shouts of 'Slunk away! ware hound!' and other cries. In truth, had I been a wild beast, there could not have been more eagerness to hunt me down—I will not say to the death, but it might have been. Happily for me, their very eagerness defeated its own object, and they fell one over the other. I lingered not: they thought themselves secure of their prey, for the only door from the garden was well secured; but the wall was no barrier to me. By the aid of a tree, I gained the top, and dropped down on the other side before my pursuers were in sight. Yet their taunting shouts long rung in my ears, though I tarried not by the way. Rung—said I? they are ringing still. Thank Heaven! I was saved from shedding blood: but I would not be so tried again—no, scarcely for the happiness of looking upon you. Coward! they called me coward!—(was I coward to stand there against a host?)—milk sop,—and churl,—and puritan,—and hypocrite! and this from your father, or with his sanction! There were taunts too of my birth, because I owned no relatives. Slandered, defamed—and by your father! The brand of shame is on me—it must be removed."

He bowed his head on his clasped hands; whilst his breathing was as heavy sighs.

"You must not heed such words, at such a time," said Mabel, soothingly. "They knew not what they said. I have heard of words like these before, yet never thought of in the morning. You must forget—"

"Forget!—I cannot school my heart so easily. You do not understand our feelings on such points: it is not with your gentler natures as with us—we cannot brook dishonour."

"Is it dishonour to be falsely called by those whose reason is obscured?" asked Mabel, timidly.

"Ay; if they knew the meaning of the word, its very falsehood calls for punishment."

"What punishment?" she asked more steadily.

"He who said it, must recant—or—"

"Or what?" she demanded firmly.

"The stain must be washed out," he answered fiercely.

"Thou shalt do no murder!"

The young man started at the words spoken in a tone so low, and yet so clear; for an instant he gazed on her who had uttered the rebuke—his gleaming eye fell beneath her pitying look, and his face was again bowed on his clasped hands.

For a time he spoke not; a low sob broke the silence—he raised his head, and the flush had left his cheek—he was pale, deadly pale, and his eye was dim. His voice startled his hearer.

"Would you have me live dishonoured?"

The weeper checked her sobs.

"Who shall dishonour you but yourself?—what but your own acts?"

He turned away without reply; but he could not bear her tears.

"What would you have me do?" he asked in a softer tone; "I cannot see you weep."

"Forget all that passed."

"That cannot be!—you ask in vain; I hear their tauntings still. As I said before, you feel but as a woman. Would you have me live beneath the mock of scorn?"

"Rather than beneath the wrath of God!"

He gazed upon her in surprise—there was a sublimity in her beauty that he had never seen before. She was no longer the gentle, loving, yielding girl;—she was the Christian woman—pleading, warning.

"You may be right;—those argue coolly who do not feel the wrong."

"Believe me that I feel your wrong;—but is revenge for man? You gave not life—is it for you to take it? Can the words of the evil-minded bring a stain on the pure of heart? You have withstood the many—now withstand the one; that were a noble victory indeed!"

"Live with the shame still upon me, and the words uncancelled? How should I meet your father's eye? the eyes of honourable men?"

"Shall he who fears not the eye of God, shrink from the eye of man? And why think that there is shame upon you? Is it shame to withstand evil? to brave the mocking jest, and the gibing taunt? Is there shame in this? No! and you would not think so were another in your place."

"Then you do not despise me?"

"I admire,—I revere you!"

"Say more,—say that you love me, Mabel; breathe but that word, and I am as a slave before you, to do with as you will."

She withdrew her hand, with a gentle but reproving gravity.

"It is the motive which gives value to the deed. Grant not that for the sake of one erring as yourself, which you refuse to Him in whom there is no shadow of turning."

"Is this a moment for reproof?" he asked reproachfully.

"Reproof! Do not give my words so harsh a name; I would but see you as yourself."

"No, not as myself—as you. What should a gentle girl know of the feelings and the judgment of strong men?"

"When she hears the judgment of man opposing the commands of God, she can see that there is error. Forgive me! I would not blame you; but I tremble at your words."

"Yet you do blame me, Mabel, though you would deny it. You would have me bear shame and contumely with a crouching spirit and shameless brow."

"Rather, with a steady mind and a forgiving heart: I would not have you fancy shame where there is none."

"But, spaniel-like, to fawn upon the hand that strikes!" he exclaimed with bitterness. "Had a blow been given, you would have said the same, and called on me to bear it all in meekness. The blow! the scoff! the taunt!"

"Did not the high and lofty One—the Maker of the heavens and the earth, bear shame, and scoff, and blow, that we, the sinful and the worthless, should have life?"

"I cannot bear dishonour!"

"We can bear little in our own strength alone."

He turned away—he could not meet her look.

"But there was no blow?" she said more softly.

"No; their hands were not upon me, or I know not what had been. For that, at least, I would be thankful."

"And words, mere words," she said with gentle earnestness; "words spoken when the blood was warm—the head not clear; you should not think upon such things again. They who said them will not.—But you heed me not; you think me cold, unfeeling. Oh! I am neither," she added, laying a gentle touch upon his arm, for his face was bowed again upon his hands.

He looked up at her tremulous voice, and his wrath vanished as he saw her tears. His proud spirit was subdued; it bowed before her gentle piety.

"Mabel, what would you?"

"Only that you should commune with your own heart, in meekness and humility."

"And you forgive me all my harshness?"

"I have nothing to forgive; smiling on him through her tears.

"I am not worthy of this gentleness. How could I wrong it by suspicion or denial?—But your father—how shall I meet him? Mabel, we must part!"

"Part!" she repeated; then added hurriedly, "My father said you had promised to remain awhile. Will you not?" she asked, looking down.

"Not after to-night. Your father cannot—"

"There is some mistake," she said, interrupting him. "He could mean no unkindness; he will tell you so himself to-morrow."

He shook his head.

"Will you be hard to be entreated?"

"Not if you entreat me; but, in honour—"

"I am vexed to have to tell you, Miss Mabel—but it is better that you should know," said old Ned, entering the room abruptly, with an anxious face,

"Know what, Ned?" asked Mabel in alarm.

"Oh, nothing, Miss, to be so frightened about as that comes to: only, as I was a coming home with the dog as master sent me arter, I seed all the gentlemen from Sir Thomas Barrett's a-coming along to the Grange, some singing, and

some talking ; and, to my mind, they bean't fit company for you just now—though, from what I overheard, they be coming to do you honour, Miss Mabel ; and they talked a great deal about Master Elton here."

"What did they say of me?" inquired the young man, quickly.

"Something about catching you yet, sir; they seemed angry you had got here afore them. If I had a known you had told my young lady, I should not a come in; but to my eye, there is not one there that could walk steady up to Miss Mabel, or is fit to talk with her. I hopes Miss, you bean't offended with the liberty," he added, in a depressing tone; for Mabel's silence, and her pale and troubled look, could not be very gratifying to a bearer of news.

"On the contrary, I am much, very much obliged to you," she said, steadying her voice as she best could, unwilling that the extent of her alarm should be apparent. "I shall go to my room directly. Do not mention your having told me of their coming, if you have not done so already; and say, if asked, I am gone to bed. Say the same of Mr. Elton, if questioned; if not, do not name him."

"We will retire immediately," said Mabel as old Ned closed the door,

"This is too much to expect; even you cannot require it," he replied.

"I do not require, but I request—I entreat it," she said, her alarm increasing as she marked the crimson spot upon his cheek.

"Ask not what I must refuse ! I would deny you nothing, but this I cannot do. Hunted as a wild beast, I stand at bay. I can retreat no farther—let him come on who dares ! I am prepared."

Mabel's pale cheek grew paler still, as she thought on the consequences of a meeting. There was no time to be lost. The very extent of her alarm gave her the power to control it. She shrunk not from the fierce flashing of his eye; she saw him look around for a weapon, but she did not tremble.

"Seek not for defence; no weapons shall be crossed beneath this roof. You have sat at my father's side—would you take his life in the home of his fathers? You saved

his child—would you shed blood before her eyes? take back the life you saved? You bade her look to you for protection—would you make her name the jest and the by-word of the drunken and the thoughtless? If you remain, she will abide here too. Hear me,” she continued, as he strove to interrupt her, though struck with her appeal. “Hear me farther:—You have said once this night that you would do my bidding if I spoke one little word. I besought you to pursue the right from higher motives; but I feared not then, as I fear now. I am weak—may Heaven pardon me! I pray you do my bidding now—I implore you to withdraw in pity to my fears. You will not refuse my prayers!”

He tried to shun her gaze, to throw off her gentle hold; but those pleading tones, that pallid cheek, the tender earnestness of those soft eyes, were as a spell which he could not break.

“ You will go? I thank you,” she said, whilst a faint glow came on her cheek, and a light into her eye; for she felt that her suit was won, though he spoke not.

“ Would you have me fly them? Would not that be cowardice?” he asked in a doubting tone.

“ No! no!” she replied impatiently, thinking she heard a distant shout. “ You must feel it would be better that you should not meet to-night. There is too warm blood in all; and we know not that they come to seek you out; he said their purpose was to do me honour. Retire! they may not ask for you; and you need hear nothing in your distant chamber.”

“ And you, Mabel, you will meet the gaze of the flashing eyes, and listen to the flattering words, of the heated reveller!”

“ This from you?”

She drew back; and for the first time he met her indignant glance.

“ Mabel, forgive me! I am not myself to-night.”

“ I hope not,” she answered, sadly.

“ I feared what those rude men might say to you. You do forgive me, Mabel,—dear gentle being?”

“ Yes. I shall not see those men. Go now—promise me to lock your door, and not unclose it, let who will clamour for admittance: tempt not evil by another meeting. I hope none will seek you.”

"This is asking much."

"It is; but you will grant it?"

"I can refuse nothing to those gentle tones:—but you will speak that one short word I prayed for?"

"This is no time!—Go! go!"

"Ah, Mabel! you win me to compliance, and then——"

"I thank you most warmly—most sincerely."

"But you will not speak that little word?"

"Not now; you should not ask it!"

"To-morrow, then?"

He read her promise in her downcast look.

When the first shout was distinctly heard, no light was to be seen in any apartment but those appropriated to the servants.

As the revellers came within sight of the house, they halted to arrange their scattered party, many of whom were far behind; yet but little could be said for their order, after all their endeavours.

"All right?" inquired one of the party, who had undertaken to marshal the drunken host, having once been at a review of militia.

"Ay, ay! all right!" shouted several, swerving from their places as they spoke.

"To the right about, face! present! fire!" exclaimed the orderer of their march.

"Ay, ay!" again shouted the band, understanding that they were to advance, and, fortunately, possessing no muskets to present or fire.

On moved the noisy rout, the fifes squeaking, drums beating; for they had procured the attendance of the village musicians, with their whitts and dubs,—the fashionable instruments of the time at country balls, before Weippert and Collinet were in being. The musicians were intended to have been in advance of the rest of the party; and probably they were also intended to have kept time and tune with each other; but neither intention was fulfilled. No sooner was the body again in motion than it became broken and scattered, as, instead of keeping in his proper place, each sought to be the first. Some fell over the shrubs or into the flower-beds—many over one another, each blaming his overthrower as the cause of the mischief. Some who were reeling away to the right, instead of the left, shouted to keep in

line; others, who seeing double, and unable to steady their steps, found the flower-garden at the Grange as difficult to thread as the Cretan Labyrinth, called for help. The musicians, some amateurs—some professors, who had been pressed into the service, and treated before their departure to increase their skill, played different tunes, or kept different time. "Blow high, blow low," mingled with "Kate of Aberdeen," "Rule Britannia!" and "God save the King!" enlivened by an old jig; whilst those who should have reserved their powers till under Mabel's window, and the striking up of the appropriate air, began the verses composed in her praise in the middle of a bar of the national anthem.

Never was such a riotous, ill-ordered crew assembled by moonlight under a maiden's window to do honour to her charms, as this band of revellers from Sir Thomas Barrett's. The uproar startled Nature from her rest. The sleeping birds woke up at the shouts, and fluttered among the boughs; the owl and the night-hawk screamed and hooted as they sailed away to a stiller spot; the poultry started from their roosts with crow and cackle; the loose dogs rushed round with bark and howl, whilst those in the kennels lent their aid to increase the fiendish tumult.

If the name of Mabel Conyers was heard from the straining of the singer's voice, the praise that accompanied it was lost; and the wild halloo, and the shouts for help, mingled with oaths and laughter, were the softest chorus to the strain. To have seen that struggling, staggering band, reeling over the smooth green turf, or crashing through the shrubs with their wild halloos, and their wilder gestures, and their shrill, discordant music,—and to think that they came to do praise and honour to a gentle girl,—might have made the gravest laugh till the woods echoed with their merriment, had there been no mingling of regret that the players of these antics were immortal beings, who took no thought of the account which they must one day render!

Mabel saw not the disorderly advance of this honorary band, for she dared not look from the window; but the din was astounding, and she would have closed her ears, only for her anxiety to learn if another name was joined with hers.

"Which is her window?" shouted the husky voice of Sir Thomas Barrett, who was the principal person in the procession and the liberal payer of the performers.

"That," said the squire, pointing to the one beside which leant the panting Mabel, unseen by those without.

"Now, then, play away, my boys! Let us sing the praises of the beautiful Mabel. You know the words, Waters; mind and sing loud enough, and we will all join in."

The order was obeyed, only a few of the stragglers being left on the greensward, or still struggling among the shrubs; and again were the praises of Mabel chanted to the mingled harmonies of "Rule, Britannia!" and "Blow high, blow low," chorused by the barking dogs.

Alas for the zealous singers! Mabel heard not her own praises, and thought not of those who sang them.

"Why, she won't show herself, though we have come all this way to sing her beauty!" exclaimed the disappointed baronet.

"Mabel is shy," said the squire.

"Better go and tell her why we are come; perhaps she is asleep," suggested one of the singers.

"Asleep!" thought Durnsford: "then the last trump will scarcely awaken her."

"Open the door, Mabel!" shouted her father, pounding on it, impatient at her delay.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, to be sure! Open the door, I say!"

She did open it; and the light he carried gleamed on her pale cheek. There was little of the timidity of which he had accused her:—she felt no alarm, or it was too great to admit of being shown by the usual marks. Her father gazed upon her in surprise, for there was that in her look and demeanour which he did not comprehend—something which he had never seen before. Her dressing-gown was folded round her, but not a curl was displaced; and either she had re-dressed in haste on the approach of the uproar, or had not unrobed, imagining that her presence might be required.

"You must go to the window and show yourself," said her father, putting down the candle on the table. "Sir Thomas Barrett and all his visitors, with all the singers and musicians he could collect, are come to sing your praises, and pay you a compliment."

"I would that they had stayed at home," observed Mabel, coldly.

"I told them that you were shy and would scarcely thank them, yet it would not do; and Darnsford said the same, but his words only made them more resolved on coming. Yet, now that they are here, you must go to the window and thank them—they have had many falls on their way."

"Is it fitting, sir, that your daughter should look from her window at this hour of night to parley with those who know not what they say or do—who have drowned the wisdom that should guide their steps?"

"But they are come to do you honour!"

"Is it honour, for those who have drunk of the wine till their steps and their reason reel, and their lips speak evil words, to come to a motherless maiden and shout till the peaceful wake with fright, and bid her come at their call and say, 'I thank you'?"

"Why, Mabel, what is come to you to-night?—you, so gentle—so timid—to look and speak so proudly! How is this?"

"Mabel Conyers may be gentle to those she loves; but she brooks not insult from strangers."

"Insult, Mabel! Would your father sanction an insult, think you? Sir Thomas Barrett loves you."

"Sir Thomas Barrett love me!"

"Yes, child, though you look so strange and scornful. He seeks you for his wife—and a good match it will be. A clear ten thousand a-year—capital hounds and hunters: not a better establishment in the kingdom! One of the right sort too, like his father: keeps up old customs—hospitable and good-tempered, drinks three bottles and none the worse. His father proposed it before his death; but I said, no; the young man should see you first—nor buy a pig in a poke. He has seen and likes you, so it is all settled; and he will soon say something to you about it. To be sure, I was not to have told you yet, only you put me out by talking of an insult.—But what is the matter, Mabel? How strange you look!—as though you wished to speak, and could not. And why do you clasp your hands in that wild way? Do not be silly! Come to the window and thank them; and then they

will all go home again. You cannot think it an insult, when I tell you that he has my permission to woo you."

"Say not so!" exclaimed Mabel, resisting his efforts to draw her to the window; "I cannot love him—do not give me to him!" and throwing her arms round her father's neck, she burst into a passion of tears.

The kind squire was in despair. He could not understand how his daughter should have any objection to marry a baronet with ten thousand a-year—one of the best hunting establishments in England—hospitable, good-tempered, and, as the world said, a prodigious fine man—that is, large enough, with tolerably good, but inexpressive features. It was entirely beyond his comprehension, and at first he thought it only maidenly timidity; but when her tears became more passionate, her declarations of the impossibility of loving him more decided, and her entreaties that he would not compel her to the match more earnest, completely sobered by the strange occurrence, he began to sooth and console her; for a woman's tears, and that woman his only daughter, to whom he had become much attached, were not to be withheld.

"Well! well! Mabel, don't cry!—I cannot bear your tears."

"Say you will not force me to be his."

"Force you, my child! I am not a Turk—I will not force you to marry any one;—but you will try to like him—for my sake."

"I cannot—I cannot,—do not ask it;" and her tears flowed afresh.

"Well, hush, Mabel,—hush! What would you have me do?"

"Oh, send them away!—all, each—directly. Do not let one remain,—do not let one come in.—Hark! they will force an entrance. Go! go!—send them away!" she continued, putting him wildly from her, and pointing to the door.

"The noise has frightened you; and little wonder," he said, as the shouts and the uproar rose louder and louder, whilst Elton's name was heard joined with a proposal to enter the house.

"Go, go, if you would have me keep my senses: let them not come in!—send them away!"

"I will;—they shall all go—not one come in: but for Heaven's sake be calm."

"I shall be calm when they have gone—I hear them at the door."

Alarmed at Mabel's wild looks and words, her father rushed to the door just as some of the party were effecting their entrance, and, after a time, succeeded in making them understand the terror which they had excited, and persuaded them to return without farther delay. Sir Thomas sent what he considered a fitting message to his lady love, and then the noisy rout began their retreat,—a retreat as disorderly as had been the advance. No very flattering remarks to Mabel on her squeamishness and folly in being frightened, spoke the disappointment of the troop and its leader.

No sooner had the retreating party passed beyond the lawn, than the squire returned to Mabel, whom he found as pale as before, but something calmer, though there was still a wildness in her look and an abruptness in her speech that he had never known till now.

"Are they gone?—all gone?" she asked as he entered.

"All gone!" he replied, passing his arm round her waist, and drawing her fondly towards him. "I am vexed that you should have been frightened; and so is Sir Thomas. He bade me say, that if he had thought you would not have liked——"

"How could I like such a fearful noise?" she said, interrupting him.

"They did make a great noise, I must admit. And so you thought it was the robbers, poor simple child!"

"Not so," said Mabel, who abhorred even the appearance of untruth; "but their shouts were fearful. Did they really only come to sing under my window?"

"For what else should they come?"

"I know not; but it was so strange and unfitting their coming here!—and I fancied I heard Mr. Elton's name, when you were with me."

"You are trembling still, child. They meant no harm to you or any one; though they were wroth with him at the time. Have you seen Edward? I hope no evil has befallen him."

"He is well," she replied, her face still hid on her father's shoulder.

"Then he is not gone away in a pet?"

"He is in his room."

"And not disturbed by all this noise! He must sleep soundly, though his room is at the other end of the house. Did he tell you what passed?"

"Yes; and it was at my earnest entreaty, in pity to my fears, that he promised not to leave his room unless compelled. I feared, when old Ned kindly told me who were coming, that they were pursuing him: and had they met—" she paused.

"You did wisely, Mabel, in your terror: he was too warm to make the meeting safe; and I cannot blame his warmth, for they carried the jesting much too far. I would have interfered, but I fear I was hardly fit for the task then, though the air has refreshed me now. Did he speak unkindly of me? I think he misunderstood, and believed I meant to join the others, and lay hands on him, when I intended to stand by his side, if I could not stop them; for I admired his boldness, though I think he had better have complied. To be sure, enough was said to heat young blood to any thing; and when I saw the sword in his hand, I feared for the lives of some: but he did well, and I like him the better for his forbearance. You do not say if he spoke unkindly of your father."

"That he was hurt I cannot deny, believing that you intended to join against him; and he thought you, too, used injurious terms, as others did."

"I do not wonder he was hurt if he thought that," remarked the squire frankly. "I might have said such things; but if I did, it was without knowing and without meaning them; and it was my positive command that stopped the pursuit. It was a foolish piece of business altogether; and I am sorry that I did not interfere at first."

"Will you not tell him this?—or may I?" asked Mabel, earnestly.

"Ah, Mabel! I suppose his blood was up; and but for you he would have been off to-morrow, or perhaps to-night; and I could not have blamed him. I will go and speak to him at once—I should not sleep in peace else; and the rest shall apologize, if he should require it. I fear this night has scarcely been to the credit of any of us. I have not been so much with you lately, or, in time, I think you would

make me as gentle as yourself; it grieves me so to see you sad or weeping. Durnsford goes to-morrow, and then we shall be more quiet. I have not been so happy for the last three weeks. Go to bed and sleep off your fright, whilst I visit Edward. Good night!—and mind you come down in the morning as fresh and as gay as a lark."

"Thank you! thank you!" said Mabel, twining her arms round his neck as he kissed her forehead.

"Open the door, Edward!" said the squire.

"I am come to say that I am sorry for what passed at Barrett's."

The door was opened, and the squire started at the look of his guest, as he had started at the look of his child.

"You misunderstood me, Edward. When I approached, it was to make common cause with you, if I could not stop the tumult by my persuasions. My remarks had before only increased the clamour; and though I called on Durnsford to second me, unluckily they took his words the other way. I fear you were hurt at my conduct; and Mabel says that I joined in the outcry against you: if I did, it was unknowingly—not being as clear as I might have been. I have no cause to remember this night with pleasure; but if you are as generous and good-tempered as you were firm and daring, you will give me your hand and promise to forget it."

"Most readily, sir, as far as you are concerned,—nay, I am the more bound to you by this acknowledgment. I fear I was rash, or should not have misjudged your kindness," replied the young man, grasping his offered hand, every vestige of resentment gone on the instant, for the squire's frankness could not be withheld. "But there were others, sir—"

"—Who said what they should not," interrupted the squire. "They shall apologize. As your host and friend, I shall insist on this. And now good-night!" closing the door before Edward could reply.

Note.—In the present state of society, such scenes as the preceding cannot occur; but at the period of this tale such scenes not only could, but actually did, occur, as might be proved by the testimony of those still living.

CHAPTER XVI.

It seemed as if Mabel had done her best to obey her father's command, to rise as fresh and as gay as a lark; at least, so thought her father as he kissed her cheek, and gazed with delight on its bright tint of rose, as Edward entered the room. He did not observe that this delicate flushing was accompanied by a slight confusion, and that the eyes were more steadily fixed on the ground than they had been of late. Perhaps one reason why he did not perceive it was, that he too was not entirely free from embarrassment, though his greeting to his young guest was frank and cordial. Two influences were at war within him;—that of former thoughts and habits, strengthened—represented, it might be said, by Durnsford; and the better thoughts that had arisen since his accident, and of which Edward Elton might be considered as the representative. Had he yielded completely to either, he might have been happier: halting between two principles, his conscience neither satisfied nor smothered, he knew no repose. The waverer is ever the most miserable and restless of men: he has neither the possession of the false peace of this world, nor the hope of the true peace of the next.

He did what many have tried to do before: he resolved to enter into a compromise for the present, and pursue a more decided course for the future. He would go to Merrick's—he must go there, for he had promised, though aware that the revel was certain to be carried to excess; but he would

come away early, on the plea of the money that he should have about him, and then he would live a quieter life. Durnsford would be gone, and he should be more with Mabel and Edward: the future should be more as they desired —as he believed was right.

The future! And who is certain of a future? Not mortal man! If we feel a habit sinful, why let it gather strength and power by continuance? Each act of compliance is a new sin; and that faith is worse than doubtful, which knowingly permits the infringement of God's law, salving the conscience with the promise of future amendment.

"So neither you nor the fair Mabel will fix a day to come to me?" said Mr. Durnsford to the squire, as they walked together in the grounds some time after breakfast, the visitor leading where he pleased.

"I am not inclined to leave home just at present," replied his host; adding with a rather embarrassed manner, "I am getting old, I believe, and must keep more to my own fire-side."

"Getting old!" remarked his companion incredulously. "So is Ranger," pointing to a fine young setter hunting the hedge-rows. "Philip Conyers, who led the hunt last spring, getting old, and sitting by his own fire-side! You are not afraid of another fall? Grown nervous like a fine lady? Your father did not do so. 'If a man falls, let him mount again,' was his saying; yet he died quietly in his bed. I hope Horton has not been frightening you with any of his fancies: he is enough to make a woman of any man. Those doctors bring one into the world, and send two out. There is Balfour—you remember him down here with Barrett last year,—a fine, hale, hearty man, like yourself; could outdo the youngsters, and drink his four bottles, yet none the worse. Three months since, he was ordered to give up hunting, and not drink more than two glasses after dinner. He is dying—that order will be the death of him: whatever a man is accustomed to do, that he should continue. When I saw him a month ago, he was looking like a ghost. I tried to persuade him to return to his old habits; reminding him that his father had lived to a good old age, and died beloved and respected. But it would not do: he was as weak as a child; said that he did not dare; and looked at the young man who is to marry his daughter, and come into his for-

tune, as though he was under his control, and feared to act contrary to his wishes. He is become the laughing stock of the whole county for these fancies; and yielding to the vagaries of a young man, at his age when he should know better. I could not laugh—I only pitied him!"

"I am not afraid of acting contrary to Horton's advice, when I think it wrong," remarked the squire, rather testily.

"I did not seriously suppose that you were: you are not so weak as to be held in leading-strings by him or any one else.—Talking of leading-strings, when did young Elton return? It is lucky he was not in the house when there was that uproar last night, some calling on him to come out;—with his fiery temper, and the inability of several to defend themselves, there might have been more than one coroner's inquest required. Well for all, that he had not returned!"

"He had returned; but his room is at the other end of the house, and Mabel had made him promise not to quit it unless absolutely compelled to do so."

"You amaze me? I should not have thought that even Miss Conyers, though it is his wish and interest to gain her favour, could have won such a promise. I believed him to be one who absolutely spurned leading-strings for himself, however eager to impose them upon others;—but our interest compels us to many things. How grand he looked last night, sweeping that large sword round him among his unarmed companions, who were merely in jest—a jest likely to have become a serious reality though!—There are some tempers that cannot brook a little innocent merriment; they are too proud and overbearing to submit to what appears to lower their fancied dignity. Yet it is a fine bold young fellow, if he would but keep his bravery for more fitting occasions, and not make himself ridiculous by its injudicious display. It was a folly, or an insolence to those older than himself, to refuse the toast: had he drunk it quietly, all would have been well; but no—he must make a riot and a bravado, and, on my word, I think some had a narrow escape with their lives. He did not tell Miss Conyers what passed, I conclude, or her terror afterwards is fully accounted for."

"I do not know how much she heard, but enough to

make her dread a second meeting. I am afraid there were many to blame, and only one to praise," remarked Mr. Conyers; but not with his wonted boldness, for he was again yielding to Durnsford's influence.

"Several to blame, certainly, if you choose to censure what was meant as a merry jest. A pretty tale he told your daughter, I have no doubt, with himself for the hero: I never knew any one who could tell a story better; there is a natural eloquence about him—a seeming frankness, which enables him to make the worse appear the better cause to all those who do not look beneath the surface. I wonder what he said of you and me? Nothing very handsome, I suspect, judging from your daughter's manner this morning, though we stood his friends. What is his father? The people round here have a strange fancy that he is a nephew of Hather's, the man I said he was like when I first saw him—the son of his elder brother, that unhappy man who was tried for forgery, and only acquitted through the skilful roguery of his attorney!"

"Impossible!" said the squire quickly.

"So I told them; but I have had to defend him several times. I wonder people will take such silly fancies into their heads, and not give them up either, though there is positive proof to the contrary. 'Would Philip Conyers keep him under his roof, treat him as a friend, and let him be always with his daughter, if he were the son of a forger?'—was my question. 'I do not know,' said some: 'the squire is too kind-hearted to be very penetrating; and he is a clever young man, and I am much mistaken if he has not the length of his host's foot.'—'Nonsense!' I replied; 'Philip Conyers is the kindest of human beings, but he is not a simpleton.'—'I cannot tell,' remarked another: 'it was very strange his taking him up so suddenly:—he can wind the squire round his finger, and we shall hear of his marrying his daughter, and being made his heir. Who is he, pray, if he is not the forger's son?'—'That is more than I can tell, but of course Conyers knows,' said I.—Who is he, Philip? Tell me all about him, that I may contradict these foolish reports more boldly. It is a pity that they have mingled your daughter's name with them. I have asked him of his connexions once or twice; but he always turned the conversation, and would not own even a distant relation-

ship to any of the different families of the name of Elton who were named to him; and others, I find, say just the same: the universal question seems to be—Who is he?"

"He is a fine young fellow, and a capital rider," said the squire sharply, with strong symptoms of vexation.

"That is what he is, and not who he is."

"I never asked," replied the squire-doggedly, finding that he must give an explicit answer. "I was not going to marry him; nor was I afraid that he would cheat me," he added, as if by way of averting the blame which he fancied coming.

It failed in its purpose—out came the censure, and Mr. Conyers felt it more from a consciousness of deserving it. With a young, lovely, and motherless daughter, he was bound to have made inquiries before admitting a young man like Edward Elton to all the privileges of a friend known from childhood.

"Good heavens, Conyers! Do you mean to say that you have let the young man remain in your house an honoured guest for so many months, in perfect ignorance of his character and connexions? I could not have believed this possible, and positively contradicted the report when some of your old friends indulged in smiles at your credulity. Do you really know nothing of his connexions?"

"Nothing," answered the squire, employing himself vigorously in cutting off a thistle-head with his walking-stick. "I tell you again, I was not going to marry the young man."

"But the young man may be going to marry your daughter."

"Marry my daughter!" repeated the squire, looking up in amaze, as if the possibility of such an occurrence had never entered his imagination.

"Pshaw! Durnsford, you are always suspecting something. The young man would have told me of his family when first he came, but I did not wish to hear. His father is a very good sort of man, I dare say: and as for thinking of marrying Mabel, I will answer for it that such a thought never came into either of their heads. He is too honourable, and she is too shy."

"I know nothing about his honour; but I am older than he is, and even I feel that Miss Conyers would be no mean



temptation to make me forget that the father might not approve of my suit as much as the young lady herself. We are old friends, Philip; and whilst others have changed, we have been the same, never having had even a disagreement: if it were otherwise, I should not venture to speak as I do; but I feel your interest as my own," placing his hand caressingly on the squire's shoulder.

"I know all this;—say what you please," remarked Mr. Conyers, much affected.

"Thank you, Philip, for this liberty. You will pardon me if I tell unpleasant truths; but I have the happiness of yourself and gentle daughter much at heart, and fear both have been perilled: you are too good and kind yourself to have a suspicion of others. I do not wish to say any thing harsh of this young man; but indeed you have been imprudent to encourage such an intimacy between him and Miss Conyers. You fancy he has no other feeling towards your daughter than esteem: now, if I know the symptoms, he is a lover—and what is more, by no means a hopeless one;—he as surely expects to be your son-in-law as does Sir Thomas Barrett."

"Nonsense!" replied the squire, angrily; "he cannot have so much presumption. He could not suppose that the daughter of Philip Conyers, one of an ancient and honourable family—perhaps heiress of the Grange,"—and his voice faltered as he said this,— "would wed with a nameless youth, who, by his own showing, has his fortune to make:—nor could he suppose, if he won the girl's consent, that the father would be so yielding. The young man has too much spirit and honour for that."

"You do not make allowance for the greatness of the temptation, and will find you have been deceived. To gain a lovely bride, a kind father, and a good fortune at one stroke! where is the young man without birth or riches who could withstand making the attempt, if possessing powers likely to command success? And such powers no one can deny Edward Elton. I scarcely know how to blame him, though he should have been withheld by gratitude to you;—but then Mabel is very charming, and a fortune by marriage more pleasantly acquired than by toiling day after day at the desk or the counter. Who would not rather live at the Grange, with hunters at command, and the lovely Ma-

bel to smile upon him, than weigh out soap and tallow, draw invoices, or add up bills! You still look incredulous; but only just think over their conduct, and then admit that I am right. Is he ever from her side when with any tolerable propriety he can station himself there? Does she take a sketch which he does not look over and correct? Does she sing, but he praises or accompanies? Does she like a book which he does not admire? Does either say or do any thing without looking at the other for sympathy? Why, their eyes meet a thousand times a day. Does she fear any thing when he is by, or decline any thing which he proposes? And yet you doubt his views, and the influence he has acquired. Does not she call him 'Edward'—a stranger, unknown six months ago? and is not her voice soft as the sigh of the evening breeze when she speaks to him? And does not he call her 'Mabel'? and are not his tones, too, like the gentle murmur of the silver stream when he addresses her? And do they not wander forth into the woods and fields? and does not her arm rest on his, sometimes with the timidity of unassured, sometimes with the trust of assured affection? These are not the customs of our times."

"Pooh! pooh! Durnsford! this is all my doing. It seemed so formal to hear them calling each other 'Mr. Elton' and 'Miss Conyers,' after they had been living together for weeks, thinking only of nursing and amusing me,—he as though he had been my son,—that I bade them be more like brother and sister. You see too much."

The squire's manner did not show so plainly as his words the certainty that Durnsford saw more than existed:—it was evident that he was arguing against a growing and unpleasing conviction.

"Brother and sister!" repeated Mr. Durnsford with a smile at his friend's simplicity, by no means welcome to that friend. "Depend upon it, if ever Edward Elton thought of being your son, he never contemplated having the lovely Mabel as a sister. You doubt still?—why, the whole neighbourhood rings with it! Sir Thomas Barrett is too generous to be jealous, and has too just a reliance on your honour to doubt your keeping your word; but even he, I hear, has been hurt at the reports. For myself, I firmly believed, till you assured me to the contrary, either that you knew every particular concerning the young man, and would approve of

the match; or that your daughter's affections being engaged to Sir Thomas Barrett, should Elton form such a design, it would be but 'Love's labour lost.' I am shocked to think how your kindness and hospitality may have misled you! If I could but awaken you to a sense of the danger of allowing him to be constantly with your daughter, the mischief might be averted :—a mere fancy for an adventurer, however fascinating, might be soon got over; but longer intercourse may deepen it into a feeling."

"Do you think, then, that he has been tampering with Mabel's affections? and that she loves him?" inquired the squire, angrily.

"Of the first I have little doubt; of the last, you are the best judge. If she readily accepts the attentions of Sir Thomas, it is full proof that she is not under the influence of this young stranger, who fancies that he can rule all persons and all circumstances to his will."

The squire looked still more vexed than before.

"As for the baronet's attentions, I am not certain that they have been very lover-like. To be sure, he looks enough at her; but she never seems to know it; and last night, when I named the subject, she was in such a fright, and trembled and sobbed so piteously, begging me not to force her to marry him, that I was obliged to promise to let the matter rest for the present. I thought it was only her shyness; and I still hope that it is no more."

"Her shyness! You attribute too much to that. Shyness never prevents a woman from being in love, though it may her being a flirt, or openly showing her regard. Besides, I find her much altered since I was last here; she is fast passing from the lovely, yielding girl, into the beautiful, decided woman. She is learning to have a will of her own; and that will is, at present, to please Elton in all things. If she sobbed so violently at the mere proposal of Sir Thomas, rest assured that that sobbing had to do with some stronger feeling than mere shyness. Did she mention Mr. Elton's name last night?"

"Yes! yes!—she seemed only anxious for his safety, fearing that the party had come in pursuit of him. No wonder she was so eager that they should go away, and had made him promise not to leave his room, persuading me to go and apologize. What a fool I have been not to see this!"

—if it is really so. But I cannot believe it; Edward would not act with dishonour, or Mabel with deceit," added the squire, unwilling to credit evil of those he loved, or to imagine what would thwart his plans.

"As for honour, all have not your high and delicate feelings. He may pretend to have misunderstood your words—'I wish I had such a son.' You must not expect the same high principles from a nobody, with his fortune to seek, as from a gentleman of ancient family. He may make a thousand excuses: he did not think you would object—he loved before he was aware—he hoped to acquire fortune;—he felt that her affections were his, before he had contemplated the idea—to desert her then would have been cruel, and he hoped in time to win your consent;—or he thought that you must have seen his feelings, and did not disapprove. Trust me that he will be at no loss for excuses. I never knew one better able to defend any cause, however desperate. The plain matter of fact, that, knowing his poverty—setting aside his birth—he should not have abused your unsuspecting hospitality by winning your daughter's affections, but should have left the house the moment he saw the remotest possibility of such an occurrence, or stated his feelings, leaving you to decide, will be so glossed over and smothered by his eloquence as to be entirely lost sight of. Nay, such are his powers, and the influence he exerts, or endeavours to exert, over most, that if you have a talk with him, I should not wonder if he persuaded you to believe him the most honourable of youths—the fittest husband for Miss Conyers,—and myself the most deceitful and slanderous of men, merely for having seen what it was not intended I should see, and for having presumed to warn an old and valued friend."

"No! I am not such a fool as that!—though I do not wonder at your thinking so, if all is as you say."

"If it should not be as I say, I do not stand alone in the error. My servant tells me that the villagers believe it is to be a match, and say he has determined what alterations to make when the Grange shall be his, meaning to take Mr. Astel as his model. Mind, I do not vouch for the truth of this, nor for what they say farther—namely, that Martha Wilford has connived out of spite to you, whom she always blames for poor Philip's running away. I remember you told

me that she had sent for him and your daughter, and insisted on their not revealing what she had pretended to foretell. What connexion can there be between them? I have sometimes doubted whether that haughty woman's early conduct could bear strict examination. You have no clew, I think you said, to the young man's family, or we might endeavour to trace it."

"None! Who did you say the people think he is?" inquired Mr. Conyers, sharply.

"Some imagine, the son of Hather the forger, brother to the man who cheated you; but there is no positive certainty on the point. The resemblance to his uncle has been seen by several; and it is said that Hather has been living for some years in a very secluded part of —shire."

"Ha! that is the part of the country from whence he came; and he owned to living a lonely life with his father, never seeing any one," exclaimed the squire, striking his stick deep into the ground in the impulse of his anger. "That seems a confirmation. It is not fair to judge people on such trifles, but do you remember one day at dinner his declaiming on the unjust severity of the laws against forgery, and insisting that their cruelty, as he termed it, should be softened?"

"Very likely, though I do not recollect it; but if Hather's son, it is very probable;—only a villain of a lawyer saved him."

Some might think that prudence and policy would have forbidden the subject to a clever, scheming young man, aware of his father's crime; but the honest squire knew nothing of policy, and, at times, little heeded the hints of prudence.

"This might account too for his horsemanship, for his uncle was an admirable rider," observed Mr. Durnsford. "Did you remark the letter he received yesterday morning? —the contents seemed to perplex him."

"I know that he had a letter—nothing more. But it cannot be as you say—it is impossible that I should have been so deceived! I will ask him of his father and his views."

"And he will deny or extenuate—profess gratitude, appeal to your generous feelings, and look very sad: Mabel will come in with her tears, and Philip Conyers will be

melted either into a sympathy with the lovers, or forgiveness to the contrite pair after a trip to Gretna."

"No such thing!—you do not know me!" exclaimed the squire, wrought to rage by his companion's sneers. "I will not yield! I am no baby to be cheated—gulled.—She shall not marry Edward Elton! What can I do more?"

"I did not mean to vex you, Philip;—but I will tell you what you can do more. Give the young man a civil dismissal by letter, saying that since such reports exist, it will be best for all parties that he should depart, your daughter being engaged to Sir Thomas Barrett: add every good wish, and a present, if you desire it; though Fury has paid him enough for enjoying your hospitality whilst occasionally visiting your sick-room. Do not be harsh! He has many good points—the temptation was great, and you a little to blame in not making inquiries. Above all, pointedly decline an interview; and give no intimation of this to Miss Conyers,—that is, unless you have more taste for tears and entreaties than I have. I would rather encounter a mad dog than a weeping woman; though, to be sure, those tears injure no one, but dry up as April showers, and the sun shines out again. Send your daughter to-morrow to pay her long-promised visit to the Dowager Lady Barrett—have the note delivered as soon as you have started for Merrick's, and the youth will be gone before your return, without any fuss or scandal, no one knowing a word about the matter."

"I doubt if that would be quite handsome or hospitable," said the squire after a moment's consideration. "I should like it, to save me trouble; but the young man has always been respectful and attentive, and might complain of being turned out of the house, and not heard in his defence, when I have so often pressed him to stay."

"I admire your high feeling, but you are too scrupulous; Philip. If there could be any doubt of his having sought to win your daughter's love, it would be different; but what else could have caused Miss Conyers to weep at Barrett's proposal, when all the other girls in the county would jump to have him? Had he come forward boldly and avowed his feelings, you might have acted otherwise. Do you ever ask the fox for his defence, before you lay the hounds upon the scent? You know that you lose your poultry—you know that Reynard, notwithstanding his quiet, demure look, has a

taste for fowls and turkeys—you see him beside your hen-house, and you do not stay the hounds to call a jury or listen to a parley. You do no wrong to this young man—you only decline a farther acquaintance which could bring little pleasure to either."

"I don't know—" said the squire, still hesitating; "I am loath to send him away without an explanation—he deserves a reproof, or no dismissal."

"I am not fond of giving reproofs, and am too decided myself to recommend delay or vacillation in others," remarked Mr. Durnsford with what his companion interpreted into a sneer at his weakness.

"I do not like reproof or vacillation any more than yourself," replied the squire angrily, his temper waxing warmer every moment. "If I knew—if I were but quite certain that he had made love to the girl, I would—" Here Mr. Conyers paused, striking his stick again into the earth too firmly to be removed without a violent effort.

"There is proof before you, then,—that is, if you will believe your own eyes," said Mr. Durnsford with a slight tinge of sarcasm. "I saw her blushes and her downward look when they first met this morning; I heard him ask her to grant him a private interview—you know she declined coming with us—and now there they are together! You can scarcely see their features, and certainly not hear their words; but only mark their manner towards each other, and then doubt longer if you can. See! they are at the top of the ascent:—he has just got over the stile, and is standing below to assist her;—she places her hand in his with a little maidenly hesitation, and springs lightly to the ground;—she requires his assistance no more, but the hand is still retained—she makes a faint show to withdraw it, yet allows it to linger in his;—now he looks into her half-averted face—now he speaks and listens for her whispered answer;—it is spoken!—both hands are held in his—and there they stand, lost in the dream of love! thinking that none shall part them! but they shall be parted—" and the speaker gnashed his teeth as he said it. "See! he has resigned her hands—but not till she has spoken;—he has drawn her arm within his, and there it rests with a love-like mingling of trust and timidity. There is many a secret thought revealed by the

resting of a hand upon an arm. The tale of love has been told,—and not frowned on either!"

"Villain! he shall rue this day!" exclaimed the squire, springing forward, fired to fiercer wrath by the vivid description of his companion, who himself appeared highly excited.

"Stop!" cried Durnsford, laying a strong grasp on his arm, and drawing him behind a small thicket, close to which they had been standing,—"Stop! they come this way:—if you rush out now, they may escape you—or you will be breathed up the ascent, and unable to speak. Wait till they come near;—and then—out upon them!"—Durnsford relaxed not his hold; but the squire ceased his struggles, convinced of the wisdom of the advice, though his fury could ill brook the restraint. There he stood behind the little hawthorn brake, his eyes gleaming on the advancing couple, who were too much engrossed with each other to see him through the branches—his hands clenched—his teeth pressed tightly on his lips, lest his wrath should forth before the fitting time,—a wrath increasing every moment, as the movements of those he watched were pointed out in a hissing whisper by his companion, who showed an unusual violence of emotion. When that wrath so hardly restrained should burst forth, it would be fearful. The fury of a generally good-tempered man is awful: it is like one of the fearful storms in the beautiful islands of the West. Such storms are rare; but when they come, they leave terror, and desolation, and despair behind them.

The field in which the squire and his friend were standing shelved deeply down from either side into the centre, through which ran a little stream gurgling over its pebbly bed, and fringed with flowers of a thousand dyes.

How the young heart loves the beauty of the flowers that bloom in our fields and beside our streams, filling the air with fragrance, and the earth with loveliness!—and all without our care or culture!—making an Eden round us—springing up in our path, ere we have wearied ourselves by seeking for them, like unexpected pleasures—deeds of love from those in whom we had not looked for them, or the joys of the young and hoping heart ere appalled to satiety or worn down by disappointment. Beautiful things! that we love the more, to stow in our own minds for having left them to come to their gentle glory unlooked for and uncared for.

Let who will keep their jewels and their gauds ; give me
the flowers of my native woods ! those woods themselves in
all their dreamy beauty. Let who will listen to those magic
sounds—

“The witching words of flattery,
The music and the mirth of revelry?”

give me the gentle rustling of the forest boughs, the mur-
muring of the crystal stream, the gladsome song of birds. Give
these again ! and then—alas ! what then, if you give not
back with these the feelings and the hopes of early youth ?
And those you cannot give !

“The heart can know no second spring.”

Besides these flowers, there were little brakes of haw-
thorn, sloe, and maple, scattered on each side of the mur-
muring stream, intermixed with a few young oaks and elms ;
and it was from behind one of these leafy screens that the
squire and his companion stood, whilst Mabel and Edward
were descending the steep on the other side of the rivulet.
Those who watched were in shadow ; but the sun shone out
in all its brightness on the green slope down which the lovers
passed by a narrow winding path :—round them it was all
sunshine—not a shadow, not a cloud. Lovers they were,—
and hopeful lovers too. Mr. Durnsford had spoken the truth
—no matter how he knew it :—the tale of love had been
told—and that tale had not been frowned on. The whisper-
ed acknowledgment had been made; and they were discussing
the future, as the young and the happy are wont to discuss it.
Such see no bar to their hopes—or only see to overleap it.
In fact, their feelings were brighter than hopes, if such can
be ;—the lovely dawning of a brilliant certainty—the prom-
ise of a glorious and unclouded day. Alas for the beauti-
ful dreams of the young ! the dewy gems of the morning
hour !—ere life is at its noon, they have melted away, and
are no more seen.

“Nay, Mabel ! my own gentle Mabel !—for none shall
part us,—this is but the whispering of your timidity ; your
father cannot have been blind to my love, though my lips
told it not. I wish now that I had not heeded the black

dame's advice ; but she knew so much of the past, I thought she might judge of the future ;—and Mr. Durnsford's presence, that, I knew not how, seemed to keep us apart, with your father's fancied coldness, combined to render me silent. He shall know all to-day."

They had now reached the foot of the steep descent, and were standing beside the little stream, just where a broad plank with a light rough rail formed a bridge across its gurgling waters.

" Let us linger here a moment," said Mabel, as they stood on the plank, looking down into the clear stream with its glittering pebbles. " See, how it dances on—so clear, so bright—whilst the flowers bend down to meet its waters, dimpling into mimic waves. Does it not look all hope, and joy, and happiness ? Is it not beautiful ? "

" Not half so beautiful as you, my own sweet Mabel," replied the happy lover, who had no eye or thought for aught beside.

" Yes, far more beautiful,—I would not have you flatter," said the blushing girl, bending lower over the rippling stream. " See ! all is so bright—so happy ! "

" Yes, all is bright and happy ; but naught so bright as you—so happy as myself. Turn not from me, Mabel ! Are you not to me the brightness of this life ?—its beauty, and its glory ? The heart will wither in your absence ; and yet I fear that I must leave you."

" Leave me ? I thought you said—"

" Then you would grieve, my Mabel, if I left you ?—yet not as I should grieve. I was sad and restless, longing for something, yet I knew not what : but now I know,—I only pined to havethe visions of my youth fulfilled—the lovely dreams that haunted me by night and day imbodyed in a fairer form than even the brightest vision that beguiled me. Now I have found a happiness of which I never dreamt—no thought could shadow forth its semblance. I pine no longer for the world, its gauds, its glories, or its strife : I would my life should be one never-ending dream of love ;—I would be with you ever,—your presence makes it day, your absence gloom. Nay, chide me not,—I am no flatterer ; and if you think me so, then I shall say it is because you do not feel as I would have you feel. I would that you too counted

time, not as the crowd compute, but by my being with you, or away.

"Are not these words idle flatteries indeed? Who bids you go?"

"I have a father—" and he looked a little less triumphantly.

"And he will think that Mabel Conyers is too simple and too—"

"Not so, my Mabel," interrupting her. "Look not so timid and so pale: it is I that am no fitting mate for you. I would that I had rank and wealth, to lay them at your feet to do you honour. I do not heed them—for myself alone;—and you—you said you cared not for these things. Heaven has given me health and strength;—why may not I, as others, win both gold and honour? With such a guerdon as your love, what may I not achieve!"

"And your father will not—"

"—Will not what, sweet one? He cannot frown on you. I would but urge my suit in person—circumstances make it more expedient."

"I would not pain you by my questions, but your look is troubled when you name your father: and that letter yesterday—forgive me, it is not idle curiosity—I fear—"

"Fear nothing! there has been some mistake, but a few words will set all right. I fear nothing—see no obstacle! I may not have much gold, though Martha Wilford promised wealth; but I am honoured by your father's friendship, and he has said that he regards me as his son. Will he then refuse to give his daughter to me? Or if at first he should look coldly on our love, will you not join your prayers to mine? Could he resist those gentle tones—that pleading look? You are too timid and too fearful?"—for Mabel did look doubtful, remembering the proposal of Sir Thomas Barrett. "Have I not heard those precious words—'I love!' How then can I know, doubt or fear? those words are as a spell to charm all evil into good. If our fathers have been disunited, we will join them; if they have jarred, our love shall sooth them into harmony. I would look once again into those downcast eyes—I would hear once more those precious words. Nay, Mabel, say you love me once—but once again!"

Before she could reply, his arm was thrown suddenly

round her, and she felt herself held to his heart, as with a bound he cleared the little bridge on which they had been lingering, and stood in safety with his precious burden on the other side of the stream.

"Villain! how dare you!" shouted a furious voice beside him; whilst the terrified Mabel was torn so rudely from his arms, that the young man reeled with the sudden shock.

"How dare you fling your arm around my child?" exclaimed the wrathful father, his lips livid with rage so long restrained, one hand clenched and thrust threateningly in Edward's face, whilst his other arm supported his fainting child.

"Look! there is my excuse!" replied the young man, recovering from his surprise, his cheek crimsoned at the insult, his own hand involuntarily clenching to oppose the one thrust out towards him.

Even as he spoke, a young bull, goaded almost to madness by the teasing of some boys at the other end of the field and the attacks of the flies, came crashing down through the thickets directly to the spot where the lovers had stood not a minute before, his bellowing resounding far and near—his tail lashing his sides. On he rushed, splashing, scrambling, partly on the narrow bridge, partly in the silver stream, then up the opposite ascent, till, breathless and exhausted, he sank on the earth, his tongue hanging out—a glare over his blood-shot eye. He passed just where the youthful pair had stood. Edward's quick eye had seen the danger but just in time;—his promptness alone had saved them both, not perhaps from death, but from imminent peril.

Mabel shuddered in her father's arms, as the wild animal passed where she had been; and the father's threatening hand sank by his side, as he admitted the peril of his child. Yet the storm of his wrath was but slightly allayed, and there was still that in his manner to justify the young man's flashing eye. Mr. Durnsford stood rather apart, without speech or motion, save that his hand clenched and unclenched alternately, and that the expression of his features had a stronger character than usual: but the others were too much engaged to think of him.

For some moments the father and the lover stood gazing at each other in silence; and then the former spoke abruptly and fiercely, though he tendered thanks. "I thank you for

the service done my child, and am content that it should stand as an acquittal for the wrong you would have done to me. I will forget that, but for your shameful dalliance with the girl, she might have seen her danger, and have stepped aside, without the resting in your arms. Depart in peace!—let us meet no more!"

"What do you mean, sir! Shameful dalliance! What am I to understand?" inquired Edward with a quivering lip, his high spirit rising at the insult—his eye flashing back the angry glance of his accuser.

"Mean! I thought my words were clear enough to any who would understand."

"You spoke of shameful dalliance, sir."

"I did," said the squire, interrupting him, his wrath increasing as he gave it vent. "I did, and I repeat the words:—Shameful dalliance!—shameful in her, who is affianced to another;—shameful in you, a beggar!—son of a low-born convict!—or of one who should have been.—Stop, young man, and hear me out! I heed not your fiery glance or your clenched fist:—you asked my meaning, and you shall have it. I bid you go, before I call my servants to enforce the order. Your goods, too precious to be left, shall be sent safe to Weston. Go! ere I lay hands upon the villain who smiled but to betray—who fawned but to deceive. Begone, for your own sake, lest I expose you to others."

"Pardon me, sir, but I go not without some explanation of your words, or their recall," replied the young man, striving to speak with respect and calmness, though with difficulty restraining his indignation. "Had any other used those words, I should have given a briefer answer; but as Miss Conyer's father, I would bear much from you."

"You are too kind! Miss Conyers should be very thankful, and her father very grateful," returned the squire, scornfully. "You will bear much, you say—you have borne much already. The name of villain! humbly, meekly borne it! Perhaps you would bear a blow," again upraising his clenched hand.

"No, sir!" replied the young man firmly, maintaining his ground without shrinking, though cheek and lip were pallid with the intenseness of his agony,—"No, sir! I would not bear a blow, even from you; the arm should be caught ere it fell:—nor will I brook in silence to be branded as a villain.

I demand an explanation, and Mr. Conyers is not one to deny it;—he is too honourable to slander without a fancied cause—too generous to condemn unheard. There must have been some misunderstanding—or the meddling of a foe," glancing at Durnsford.

"Some misunderstanding!" shouted the squire in his wrath. "Where and how has there been misunderstanding? Am I deaf, that I cannot hear!—am I blind, that I cannot see? Will you deny that you talked of love to my child? that you strove to win hers in return? Will you deny that I saw you toying with her hand? that I heard you whisper in her ear? that you prayed her to repeat the words of love? Deny this, and I call you a liar!—admit it, and I call you villain!"

"You do me wrong, sir; I am neither. I do not deny much of that with which you charge me: I love your daughter,—I prize her love above all that the world has else, save my own honour. I know not what you heard of our discourse, but you might have learnt that it was my wish my resolve, to tell you all; whilst I regretted having allowed any circumstance to delay a full disclosure of my hopes; and if I named not those hopes to you, I named them not to your daughter,—I was the same in your presence as in your absence. Not till last night did I tell my love; not till to-day did I hear from your daughter's lips that my love was returned; and it was my purpose ere evening closed to sue to you for the richest boon that earth contains. The kindness you have shown, the regard—"

"So you will bring that very kindness and regard which you have outraged, as a charge, against me!" exclaimed the squire, interrupting him impatiently. "You will lay the blame on me, that I never saw what you never wished that I should see,—you would throw off the charge of deceit from yourself to lay it upon me. Is not this deeper villainy?—Ay, villainy? What need of mincing words? What is it else, to have sat at my board—to have drunk of my cup—to have spoken to me as a friend, and all the while to have been blinding the father to undo the daughter?—Yes, undo! Would it not be undoing to wed with a nameless beggar like yourself? Where is the home that you would take her to?"

"I have not riches, sir, I own: but I am young—might win them, or——"

"Perhaps I should not heed so mere a trifle," interrupted

the squire, far too furious to hear in patience. "Or, better still, Martha Wilford will give you the wealth she predicted though she never found it herself. Will she give birth too?—honourable birth? Take the shame from your father's name, and bestow rank and wealth, like the witches of old? And so you sold yourself to her, body and soul, for the hope—leagued with her, and would not tell your love, nor the fortune she predicted, because she bade you not! And I and my child are to be the victims of her hate—for she does hate us both. And you thought, forsooth, when you asked to be my son, that if I looked grave at first, I should afterwards bow to your rule;—that you could persuade me to any thing—that I should yield to your eloquence, or Mabel's tears. You are mistaken! I have been blind for a time;—but I see now. I am not quite the fool you took me for. The nameless beggar! The son of the base! shall not wed with a Conyers! You would win the daughter without the father's leave;—is not this villany? I call it so—but then I am a plain-spoken man."

"If you call it villany, sir, that being poor, I have presumed to love your daughter;—that being without a title, I have wooed her before your face; never veiling my admiration—never seeking a private meeting; never saying, when you sent me out day after day as her protector, what I would not that you should have heard;—if you call this villany, then am I a villain!—if not, I claim that the word shall be recalled. You knew my poverty:—ask your daughter if I ever failed in respect—if I ever, till last night, pleaded my love. I admit the folly of placing any reliance on the predictions of that singular woman, to whom I went only at your desire; I am not leagued with her—I can scarcely regard her as a friend; yet her knowledge of the past is wonderful. If you charge my love as a crime, then am I guilty: but I sought not the trial: I came at your bidding—I stayed at your entreaty. You would not let me depart. Was it villany to stay when the father would not let me go;—to love the gentlest, and the fairest, and the best, when he bade us be together, week following week, in the gloom of the sick chamber, in the brightness of the summer sun? Even you must acquit me. I have but little wealth, for false friends robbed my father of his gold: I have no rank to boast, but I come of an ancient and honourable family. I know not from whom you heard of my father's wrongs; I told them

not, and the tale, whoever told it, has been perverted: If shame rest on my mother,—and I will still disbelieve it,—there is no stain on my father's fame."

"Ha! shame rest on your mother too!—then there is double shame: and yet you sought my child! Out of my sight!"

"No shame rests on my birth," replied the young man, his own temper waxing warmer at the growing wrath of his accuser. "If my mother erred, it was after my birth; and again I say, that there is no stain on my father's fame."

"And again I say that there is!" shouted the squire. "Why else is he living lonely, far away from his former friends? Answer me that, if you can!"

"He has suffered wrong from men, and fears to trust them again," replied the young man, a little less proudly, so strange was the squire's present knowledge, considering his former professed ignorance of any one of the name of Elton.

"Wrongs!" cried the squire, scornfully. "Yes, the thief holds himself wronged by the officer who takes him; the forger, by the jury who try him."

"Thief!—forger! What mean you, sir?"

"I mean what I say, young man:—well if others did the same! He who would defraud another, is a thief; and, if report speaks true, your father knows too well the meaning of the words: he has been taken by the officer—tried by the jury."

"It is false!" exclaimed the young man, passionately.

"Provè it so! Who are your relatives? Where did your father formerly reside?

"I know not," faltered the son, seeing how far the admission would tell against him. "But I would stake my honour upon his," he added proudly.

"Stake something of more worth, if you would clear his fame.—What does your letter say? Will not that prove his honour? May we not see it?"

"For months have I been your honoured guest. Am I now to be mocked? baited, as the generous would think it shame to bait the vilest on the earth? Shame on you, sir! You should have spared the father, if you would not spare the son. I will not show the letter," he continued, goaded almost to madness by such continued insults; "I will not submit to the sneers of the heartless, the pangs of a wounded spirit.

But one thing that the letter says I will repeat. It bids me shun all of the name of Conyers, as I would shun a pestilence. There is pollution in their presence! It calls Philip Conyers one whom none should trust! whom honest men should dread! I gave no credit to the tale before,—I should believe it now."

"Ha, young sir! Dares he fling shame on me, when it clings round himself, and cannot be thrown off?"

"I tell you, Mr. Conyers, there is no shame on him; and he who says it, says a lie! But lately you knew no one of the name of Elton—since when, then, have you known my father?"

"Need a man always bear the same address? A change of name may be as prudent as a change of residence. If I never knew your father, how could I have wronged him? He counselled wisely—shun the race of Gonyers."

For some moments Edward was silent; for a fearful doubt came over him. His father owned no relative—held intercourse with none; and he had seen initials on a seal which ill accorded with his present name. Could the charge, then, be true? His head sank on his breast—a cold dew stood on his brow:—he forgot the cruel insults to himself; he thought only of the possibility of a parent's guilt. The agony was brief as intense. He remembered that parent's precepts and conduct, and he felt that the charge was false. He was shocked at the momentary doubt, still more indignant at the accusation. He looked up, and met the stern gaze of Mr. Conyers without shrinking.

"That my father may have known you in former days—that he may have met wrong at your hands, is no proof of that father's guilt. As a son, I claim to know the charge against him; and as a son, his constant companion and pupil, I deny that a stain can attach to his honour. Will you retract the charge?"

"No! I repeat it!"

"And I deny it!"

"Denial is not proof, however boldly made. The world says that your father forged—that his life was saved by gold and roguery."

"The world lies!—and he is perjured who asserts it!"

"Have a care, young man! I have borne too much already. Away! ere I strike you to the earth."

" You dare not, sir!"

" I dare not, villain?"

" I am no villain."

" Hush! hush!—in pity hush!" exclaimed the wretched Mabel, who, too faint to speak before, now interposed. " Oh, speak not thus, if you would have me live!"

The father and the lover listened to those low, soft tones, that won a hearing amid the storm of passion by their very sweetness. They looked on the deathly cheek, and there was a brief silence. " Go!" said Mr. Conyers, sternly. " Let us meet no more; and I forgive the past."

The young man started; his thoughts had been with Mabel:

" Your pardon, sir: but we must meet again;—my father's honour shall be cleared. It is I that should forgive."

" Begone! before I speak my curse upon your head—the parent's curse for bringing sorrow on his child. Go! go!" stamping with impatience.

" Go! do go now! if only for my sake," pleaded the gentle Mabel, trembling at their violence.

" If I do, Mabel, it is for your asking—not for his command. Do you believe me guiltless—me and mine?"

" I do," said Mabel, fervently.

" Will you believe it still, when I shall be away?"

" Now and ever."

" Heaven bless you for those kindly words! they will be ever with me. Farewell now—we shall soon meet again."

Then resuming his sternness, " I go, Mr. Conyers; not that I fear your threats, but that I will not pain your gentle child—I go to my father. I do not ask you now to retract your words; but when I return with the means of clearing his fame, I trust I shall not then vainly appeal to your honour to withdraw them. Your cruel insults to myself—But for the present let them pass; before to-morrow shall have closed, you may regret them more than myself. To you too, I say, we shall soon meet again!"

" I shall not shrink from the meeting. Bring proof of your father's innocence—of your own unblemished descent from an ancient and honourable race, and Philip Conyers will give you his daughter," exclaimed the squire, fully convinced of the truth of the charges made.

" I accept the promise, though made in scorn," replied

the youth, with a flushed cheek.

"And I abide by it, if you claim its fulfilment within three months," repeated the squire with a taunting laugh.

"Enough, sir! Mabel Conyers will be mine!"

The glow of triumph faded from his cheek as suddenly as it had come, when he looked on the fainting girl, whose eyes were turned on him in pleading and in sorrow. He would have approached her—he would have spoken, but Mr. Conyers waved his hand impatiently.

"Away! no farther parley till you claim my promise."

"Go, in silence and in peace!" said Mabel, softly.

For another moment his gaze was fixed on her; then, waving his hand as in farewell, he turned abruptly away, re-crossed the little bridge, and hastily climbed the steep down which he had so lately passed with that fair creature clinging to his arm. What were his feelings then? what were they now? How brief a space of time can cloud our hopes!—how swift is change!

Half raising herself from her father's arm, Mabel looked on Edward, still, springing over the style, he was lost to her view. Mr. Conyers noted a slight shudder, as, reaching the top of the ascent, he turned towards her for an instant; and when he was no longer seen, with a deep sigh, as though she had held her breath to listen to his last step, she fell back into her father's arms, pale, cold, and senseless.

C. H. C.
END VOL. I.





